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NORODOM

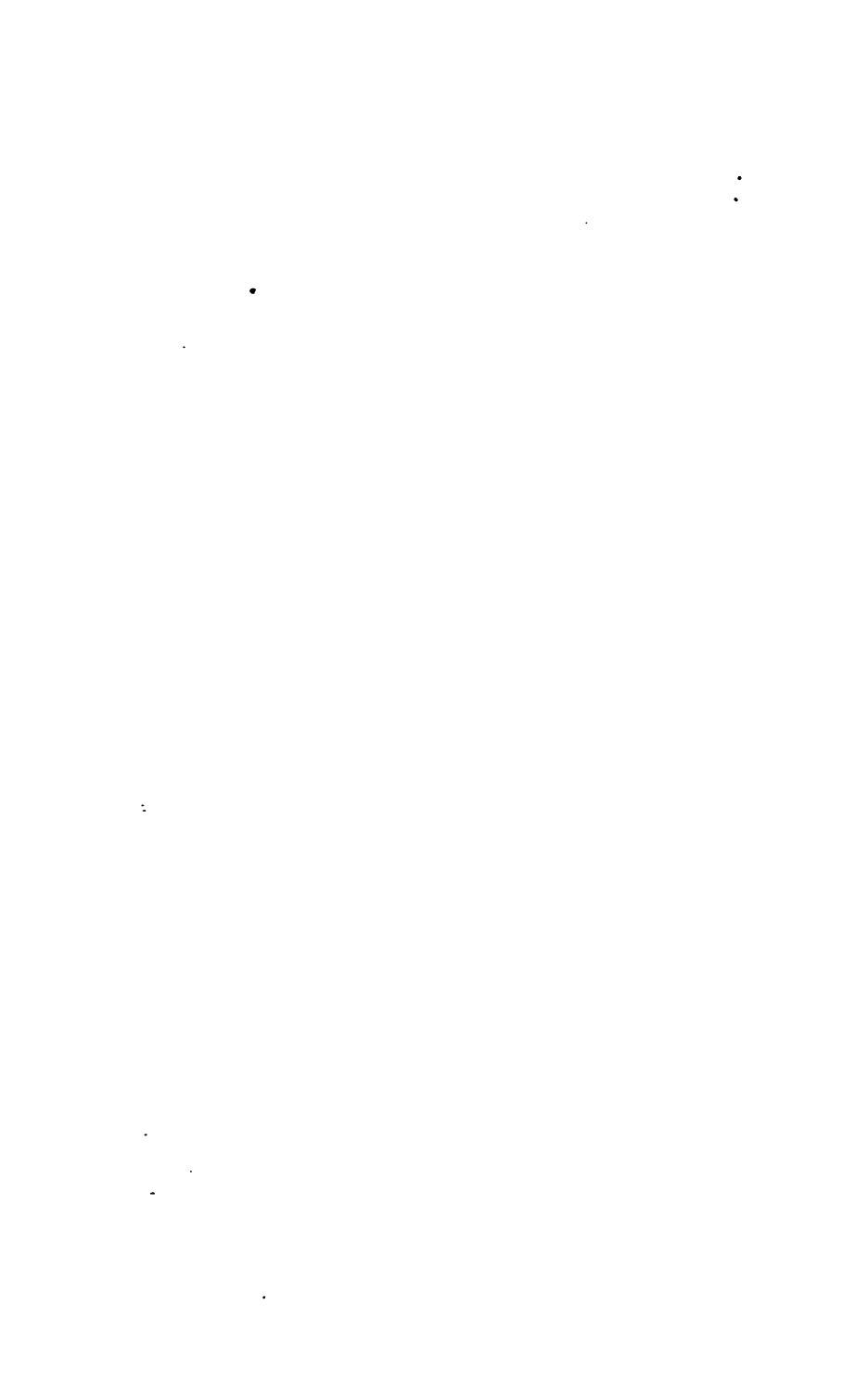
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NORODOM,
KING OF CAMBODIA.

A ROMANCE OF THE EAST.

BY
FRANK McGLOIN.

NEW YORK:
D. APPLETON AND COMPANY,
1, 3, AND 5 BOND STREET.
1882.

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AS A MARK OF ESTEEM,
THIS WORK IS RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED
TO
MR. J. O. NIXON, JR.,
ONE TOWARD WHOM
TIME HAS BUT STRENGTHENED THE BONDS OF MY FRIENDSHIP,
AND
INTIMACY HAS BUT INCREASED RESPECT.

FRANK MCGLOIN.

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NORODOM, KING OF CAMBODIA.

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

CAMBODIA, ANCIENT AND MODERN.

THAT portion of Asia which, in our day, bears the name of Cambodia, is comparatively small in area and sparsely populated. Its greatest length does not exceed two hundred and seventy miles, and its breadth one hundred and thirty. Its population is estimated at not more than a million, of which over one hundred and fifty thousand are Chinese, Anamese, and other aliens. Of what remains, fully one third are slaves.

Reference to the map of Asia shows this kingdom to be a small part of the division of that continent commonly known as Farther India, or Indo-China. It lies toward the southern extremity of the main body of that peninsula, its limited sea-coast abutting upon the Gulf of Siam. Its restricted surface is divided almost in equal parts by the mighty stream which bears its name. This great river, also called the Mekong, finds its sources among the distant mountains of China proper, and empties its waters into the sea upon the coast of Cochin China.

The government, nominally a duarchy, has a prin-

cipal and second king ; but the power and authority of the latter are so limited that Cambodia can scarcely be considered as other than a monarchy. It has its courts of law, inferior and appellate ; its mandarins, governors of provinces, and subordinate officials ; and the country is ruled with justice and moderation. Its people, though tall, well-built, and of stronger physique than those of adjoining nations, are apathetic and unwarlike. Easy-going and good-natured, they perform as little labor as possible, abandoning all the annoyances of trade to aliens residing in their midst—especially the Chinese, who seem in Asia as ubiquitous as the Irishman is said to be in Europe and America.

For a long period of time Cambodia has suffered from the continued aggressions of its more warlike neighbors. Siam has appropriated so much of its territory that the southern boundary of that kingdom now reaches to the Great Lake, which formerly lay near the center of the Cambodian realm, and about which stand those wonderful ruins which attest the former glory and splendor of the latter. So, to the south, Cochin China has absorbed some of her richest provinces, lying upon the sea-coast, on either side of the delta of the great river.

Indeed, but for the intervention of France, which, in 1863, after subjugating Cochin China, extended a protectorate over Cambodia, there can be little doubt but that, by this time, as an independent kingdom, its name would have been blotted from the maps. As it is, it will probably be not many years before the French government finds sufficient pretext for incorporating this remnant within its Asiatic dominion of Farther India.

Despite the obscurity hanging about its early history,

it is certain that Cambodia, though now reduced to insignificance, in ages long past was a great and mighty empire. It ruled the fertile valleys of the Mekong and the Meinam, and doubtless extended from the China Sea to the Bay of Bengal, and from the Gulf of Siam on the south to the frontiers of China at the north. It held commercial and other intercourse with the Chinese, and is mentioned in the annals of that people under various names, particularly those of Funan and Chinla. Its ports were visited for purposes of trade by the merchant-galleys of Ancient Rome. So great was its wealth that, in those olden times, in the mouth of the people of China, "rich as Chinla" became a proverb.

Scattered over the country are architectural remains of great beauty and magnificence; wonderful fragments from the past history of this people, proving them to have attained to a high degree of civilization. To this day they excite the astonishment and admiration of all who gaze upon them. Long walls, now dilapidated, but once high and strong, inclose vast ruins of splendid temples and palaces, which, though obscured and overrun by wildest jungle, yet stand as mighty witnesses of lost grandeur and departed power.

The great Nakhon Wat, or Temple-City, most stupendous of all these structures, by Mouhot, a French traveler, is thus referred to: "One of these temples—a rival of that of Solomon—might take an honored place beside our most beautiful buildings. It is grander than anything left to us by Greece or Rome."

CHAPTER II.

DEATH OF KIATONG. ACCESSION OF NORODOM.

DURING this period of Cambodia's glory are placed the scenes and incidents about to be related. The king, Kiatong, had succeeded a sire and grandsire, both of whom had been warriors and conquerors, extending the boundaries of the kingdom until, to the east, south, and west, the sea washed its shores, and its northern line touched the frontiers of China, Thibet, and Hindostan. Kiatong, however, though he held the acquisitions of his ancestors firmly together, had not been inclined to war. His reign was quiet and uneventful. He respected the rights of his neighbors, and to his subjects was just and merciful. Under his rule, the people of Cambodia became the most contented of all the races of Asia. With liberal contributions, during long years, they had fed his treasury ; so that, undrained by war, it was filled to overflowing.

Despite its harmless, and even virtuous character, the life of Kiatong was brought to a tragic close. He was found one morning dead upon his couch, showing unmistakable signs of strangulation. His remains were embalmed, and exposed in state, during the requisite period, and then, with appropriate obsequies, reduced to ashes.

The heir presumptive was Norodom, only son of the dead monarch. He succeeded without opposition to the throne of Cambodia and to the vast wealth of his father. Rumor whispered that the death of the latter was accomplished by a parricidal hand ; and the subsequent career of Norodom lent strong countenance to the accusation.

Nevertheless, for months after his accession the new monarch gave promise of being in every respect a model sovereign. He seemed determined to govern with wisdom and discretion, and to regulate his private life according to the rules of strictest propriety. All the officers of state who had served his father were retained. The venerable age and long experience of these gray-headed councilors were such as eminently to qualify them to advise and direct the youth and inexperience of the new sovereign. In all his relations toward the people, the latter was apparently disposed to leniency and justice, as though resolved to ingratiate himself into their warmest affections. Deceived by these pretenses, his subjects considered themselves most fortunate. Having just experienced one long and exemplary reign, they appeared to be entering upon another, giving promise of an excellence even surpassing that of its predecessor.

These pleasing anticipations, however, were not to be realized. To the nature of Norodom magnanimity was entirely foreign, and his amiability had been assumed as an actor takes his part in a play. Notwithstanding these months of apparent and constrained benevolence, he was at heart a tyrant ; blood-thirsty and depraved. The restraint imposed upon him while thus exhibiting the counterfeit of virtue chafed his vile soul. That for so long a period he had curbed his furious instincts was due to the fact that his craft was equal to his ferocity. Until he considered himself firmly seated upon the throne, and in a position to defy opposition, he endeavored to conduct himself in such manner as to disarm it.

When, therefore, he was fully convinced of the secu-

riety of his position, the restraint put upon his savage nature was released, and he yielded himself absolutely to the dominion of the vilest passions.

CHAPTER III.

BURSTING OF THE STORM.

THE change was sudden, and, like a clap of thunder from a clear sky, it burst upon his astounded subjects. The incredulous people heard one morning that the king had decreed the slaughter of all the wise and venerable councilors of his father, whom, with hypocritical earnestness, he had solicited to remain in his service.

All doubt was rudely dispelled, when, as evening approached, the horrified citizens of the capital beheld the dead bodies of these unfortunates cast out upon the highways for the dogs to devour.

The unfortunate victims of this murderous freak were men who had grown gray in the service of Kiatong, and who had endeavored, with zeal and fidelity, to promote the interests of their new master. They had, however, little suspected his true character, or been aware of the fact that their wise advice and well-meant interferences, although the result of his own hypocritical solicitations, had been held as galling presumptions, to be visited in due time with dire punishment.

From the time of this appalling crime Norodom showed himself as cruel and capricious as before he had seemed just and humane. There was no passion, how-

ever vile, that was not indulged at the expense of his unfortunate subjects. Such was the depravity of his nature that, to him, the very presence of purity and virtue was unendurable, and he studiously kept from his association and intimacy all that were not servile imitators of his own iniquity. By this course he surrounded himself with infamous men and dissolute women, whose enticement or vile applause led him constantly from one vicious extreme to another. The royal palace, which so long had sheltered his worthy father and a sedate and virtuous court, became now the abiding-place of sin, and wickedness held high carnival. The lusts of himself and of his villainous associates were gratified, to the grievous prejudice of the honor of countless households throughout the kingdom. The fickleness of their passions filled the streets of its cities with fallen and discarded women, who owed to this source their degradation, and served, as though by contagion, to disseminate immorality among the people. The murderous instincts of the king were abundantly gratified. His principal officers were as unfortunate, and almost as frequently changed, as the barbers of Midas. In time, appointments to high position came to be considered as capital condemnations, for to decline but hastened the calamity certain under all circumstances to befall. In such cases, even beyond death itself, the anger of the king pursued its victims, for their bodies, denied all funeral honors, were surrendered to the beasts for devourment. The dogs of the capital kept fat upon carcasses of mandarins and men of prominence cast upon the highways. The executioners of Cambodia came to exceed in dignity and importance, as they did in numbers, the magistrates of the kingdom.

Indeed, there was left to the latter but little with which to concern themselves. The majority of complaints were made directly to Norodom, the vindictive informers knowing well his delight to condemn without hearing, and to convict upon the slightest proof. The number of these prosecutions was so great that the king was unable in person to attend them all; and many were delegated to profligate companions as sanguinary as himself. The vile pride of these occasional judges, excited by the possession, even temporarily, of the absolute power of life and death, made them murderous and inexorable, so that no opportunity of inflicting the extreme penalty was lost.

CHAPTER IV.

MULTIPLICATION OF EVILS.

THE evils of this reign were multiplied and intensified by the host of vicious favorites who surrounded the wicked monarch, and pursued with eager alacrity his flagrant example. Zealously they paid him the homage of imitation, their crimes being in kind almost as heinous as those of the master, and necessarily more abundant. The protection of Norodom secured them from the rage of every one but himself, whatever might be the gravity of their offenses or the multiplicity of their crimes. To the touchy wrath of the king, however, his profligate associates fell frequent victims, because not even to them was he bound by ties of friendship and affection.

Despite this fact, there was never a lack of aspirants for the royal favor, precarious and dangerous as it was. For the gratification of their eager passions, men will be found to encounter peril as freely and boldly as the most heroic could do in the defense of honor and virtue. In the same manner will ambition, or the love of place and power, do all to win promotion or secure favor of kings.

It happened that each of Norodom's dissolute companions had, in turn, a following that shared the vices and immunities of its chief, and these were like so many sharp thorns in the sides of the people. Thus were the ripples of oppression extended in all directions farther and farther, visiting misery, often death and dishonor, upon many who might otherwise have hoped to find safety in their own obscurity. Furthermore, when the master sets flagrant example, underlings are prompt to follow; and so, throughout the kingdom, the governors of provinces and of cities became each a lesser Norodom, scourging and persecuting the people within their respective jurisdictions.

By such means it came to pass that the reign of terror extended itself into every locality, and bore upon all ranks and classes of society, until in time there were few homes, even to the humblest hovels, which were not filled with mourning and desolation. And, worst of all, the people themselves became contaminated, practicing upon each other the crimes and infamies from which they already suffered so grievously at the hands of their superiors. Thus did the unhappy condition of Cambodia pass rapidly from bad to worse, until its people were sunk into the lowest depths of misery and despair.

CHAPTER V.

ALOMPRA AND HIS CHILDREN.

FAR distant from the capital city of the kingdom, in one of the remoter provinces, dwelt a mandarin of inferior degree named Alompra, the father of two children. The elder, a son, Konesset, had just attained to man's estate, and was renowned for courage and physical power. The younger, the maiden Anirah, just budding into sweet womanhood, was beautiful beyond comparison. Of a large family these were all that had been spared to Alompra, and to him they were inexpressibly dear. The affection of this father so abundantly bestowed was in turn richly repaid, so that this family, despite early bereavements, was exceedingly happy.

The surpassing charms of the maiden drew longing eyes upon her, and although on her heart love as yet had not written the faintest trace, many had announced themselves as suitors for her favor. This awakened Alompra to the fact that his daughter was approaching, if indeed she had not already attained, the age at which, in the order of nature, she might be expected to contemplate the prospect of marriage. To him, as surviving parent, toward his children fell many duties belonging usually to a mother's province. He, therefore, intended upon this important subject to converse earnestly with Anirah. He found, however, at the very outset, that his solicitude was premature, and her heart absolutely undisturbed. She seemed to shrink even from the thought of breaking the happy family circle. Thus it happened that all advances of a matrimonial

nature met with prompt and emphatic discouragement.

Among the number of those who thus provoked denial was Mahagua, son of a neighboring mandarin, whose rank was equal to that of Alompra. He was a youth of unbounded presumption and unlimited self-esteem. Although possessed of undaunted courage, a fierce spirit, and unflinching resolution, like so many of those whose self-love is inordinate, he was a braggart. Hardly older than Konesset, from experience, he had not yet received discretion. When, therefore, others failed, he had laughed at their discomfiture, and declared vainly and foolishly that he at least, if so inclined, could force a reception more propitious.

Impelled by overweening vanity, stimulated, as it was, by the raillery of companions, and attracted by the loveliness of the maiden, he did at last resolve to conquer her affections. Nature had given him a handsome person, and with fullest confidence he advanced to the attack.

Such was the assurance with which conceit had filled him, that he made no secret of his purpose, and many whose discomfiture had been sources of amusement to him now awaited anxiously an opportunity of retaliation. His idle vauntings had reached the ears of Anirah, and, naturally, his advances met with hasty and emphatic rejection.

The mortification resulting from this repulse was most keen. Mahagua was wounded to the quick. The bitterness of defeat was intensified by the derision of companions, of which the point was sharpened and envenomed by recollections of his previous boastings. His fierce nature would not tolerate such mockery, nor

endure the sarcasms hurled against him, and he was involved in frequent quarrels and bloody affrays.

CHAPTER VI.

ENMITY OF MAHAGUA.

NOTWITHSTANDING this folly, into which he had been led by vanity and inexperience, Mahagua's native character was strong. It was also essentially vicious. Selfish to a degree, he was a stranger to every instinct of honor and virtue. His passions, naturally powerful, from infancy had been without check or restriction; and to manhood he had advanced almost without strength, and certainly without disposition to restrain them. The pride we have had occasion to illustrate, although excessive, was not the controlling vice. Anger, with its usual associates, hatred, treachery, and revenge, held the place of dominance.

For many days he brooded over this repulse so unexpected, considering it a grievous wrong imposed upon him. The sentiment he entertained toward Anirah, whatever might have been its original nature, was now transformed into hatred most intense, and one extending beyond her who was its immediate cause, and including Alompra and Konesset.

Mahagua was not a man, under such circumstances, to satisfy himself with idle fumings or harmless imprecation. His busy brain was at work, endeavoring to conceive a scheme of terrible vengeance. Many suggested themselves, but were discarded either as uncer-

tain or as not promising to be sufficiently crushing upon his enemies. As his hatred was no ordinary one, so no ordinary revenge would satisfy its cravings. Nothing short of the absolute and entire destruction of the family he despised was, for a moment, considered as capable of assuaging his fierce anger. At last, after many days of pondering, a method suggested itself seeming to afford prospects in accordance with his desires. The more carefully he considered it, the more was he pleased and satisfied of the superior fitness of the design for the successful accomplishment of his vengeful purpose. Indeed, after it had presented itself to his mind, its security and almost absolute certainty were so evident as to excite his astonishment that the plan had not been among the first to claim his attention.

Unbounded licentiousness was one of the prominent vices of the king, Norodom. His minions were ever on the alert to discover and appropriate to his base uses the fairest daughters of Cambodia. No home, humble or exalted, was secure if a maiden of unusual beauty were sheltered beneath its roof. As is the case with debauchees, he quickly tired of each successive victim, and was ever casting restlessly about for new ones. By the laws of the realm, no woman, once forming part of the royal seraglio, could be wife or concubine to a subject. Had Norodom not been cruel as he was profligate, the example of his predecessors in this regard might have been pursued. Thus, unfortunate females, losing, without fault of their own, the royal favor, would have been permitted to retain the shelter and support of the palace. He, however, when tired of a woman's charms, could no longer endure her presence. With the brutal disregard of human life and human suffering which

marked his career, putting to death his discarded victims was, in his estimation, the most certain and convenient method of enforcing this law. In this manner had he disembarrassed himself of the wretched women he wronged so soon as his fickle fancy drew him toward new acquisitions. As yet, the remoteness of the province in which Anirah lived and the difficulty and infrequency of communication with the capital had protected it from many of the evils from which other portions of the kingdom were suffering so grievously. The vile men who pandered to the base appetites of their master had restricted themselves to localities less remote and of easier access.

It was upon these characteristics in the temperament and conduct of the king that the ready wit of Mahagua had settled, as suggesting the most promising means of amply satisfying his fierce revenge. He felt that he had the means of dragging down and destroying the daughter, and, through her degradation and destruction, of inflicting upon the father and brother a sorrow worse than death itself. Reaching this conclusion, he awaited anxiously an opportunity of putting his plan into operation. He considered that all which was necessary was to make his way to the capital and bring to the knowledge of the king the fact of Anirah's existence and of the superlative charms she possessed. The highways, however, leading to the capital were at all times rough, laborious, and unsafe, and, at particular seasons, entirely impassable. No one, even at most favorable periods, attempted to traverse them without escort, and this could usually be obtained only when the merchants, in armed parties, made their stated pilgrimages. It so happened, on this occasion, that Ma-

hagua was not compelled to endure a long delay. After a few weeks a temporary improvement of the roads permitted the first great annual caravan to set out ; and with its retinue he identified himself, and thus secured safe but laborious passage.

CHAPTER VII.

BETRAYAL OF ANIRAH.

After a lengthy journey, Mahagua reached his destination ; but he experienced considerable difficulty in securing an audience with the king. This, however, was at last accomplished by the administration of a judicious bribe. Under the stimulating influence of favors received, and of others promised, an attendant upon the person of Norodom was induced to inform his master that a stranger was without who bore tidings of a virgin of transcendent loveliness residing in a distant province. The curiosity and evil passion of the monarch were both aroused, and he issued peremptory command that the messenger be brought immediately before him. As the mandate was obeyed, Mahagua prostrated himself upon the floor, with face to earth, in accordance with the custom of the country when an inferior finds himself in the presence of his superior. Then receiving the royal permission, Mahagua, in the fervid language of the East, recited the many charms of the maiden Anirah :

“O Mighty Ruler of Land and Sea, Lord of the Celestial White Elephant, and Master of many White

Elephants ; Owner of Indra's Weapon, and Lord of the Power of Life and Death ! she of whom I bring thee tidings is fair, and brighter than the flowers of spring. Her skin is soft as the velvet upon the peaches of Cathay, and yellow as the tears of gold by Surya shed, and now hidden in the bosom of the mountains. Her breath is fragrant as the perfumed incense of Agilawood as it burns in the temples. Eyes, soft, deep, and melting, evoke visions of rapture ; and the voice is music itself. The figure, full and enticing, is rounded like the swells of ocean, while the carriage is stately as the slow flight of the eagle, yet graceful as the movement of a fawn. Never, O Mighty Master ! has there been another maiden with loveliness so richly endowed. Would that my tongue could describe charms so transcendent as to be beyond the merit of others, and which royalty alone is worthy to enjoy."

By these words of Mahagua the imagination of Norodom was powerfully affected, and his heart was filled with desire to contemplate and possess the virgin whose beauty had been so warmly described.

"Thou has promised much," he said, "concerning this maiden. Woe to thee if, without just cause, our expectations have been aroused, for we are not to be trifled with or deceived."

"Great Master of the Universe, King of all Kings, Lord of White Elephants," after a deferential silence of some moments, Mahagua made response, "the slave who prostrates himself before thy mighty countenance offers his life in pledge for the verity of his words. May he be stricken with plague if ever, for a moment, the audacious thought of deceiving thy Majesty was present in his mind. She of whom he has spoken is Anirah,

daughter of Alompra, a mandarin residing in the distant city of Atonga, close upon the frontiers of China."

The monarch said no more, but signed the wretch to withdraw. This Mahagua did, rejoicing over the effect his words had evidently produced. He had now no doubt of the king's adopting immediate measures to secure so fair a prize, nor did he conceive it possible that the new passion would be less ephemeral than its predecessors. Norodom, however, suspicious as he was cruel, had ordered the detention of Mahagua until such time as the fervent descriptions of the latter should be either verified or disproved. This caused no uneasiness to the prisoner, who was confident that the facts would justify his assertions.

A military force, sufficient to secure safety upon the road, was at once dispatched under the command of an old and experienced officer named Zanda. With it the favorite courtier Myamma went, particularly charged with the responsibility of securing Anirah and conducting her to the capital. The season was not propitious, inasmuch as the contemplated journey could scarcely be accomplished before the annual rains set in; but the impatience of the king would not brook delay. Therefore, as speedily as possible, Myamma, with his escort, departed, forcing a way through the parched jungles, or swampy lowlands, and across the rugged mountains intervening, until at last Atonga, the city of their destination, drew near.

CHAPTER VIII.

TORTURE OF KONESSET.

THE purpose of this expedition and its starting had not been kept a secret. The consequence was that news of its approach, and of its object, preceded it, and the relatives and friends of Anirah were filled with confusion and alarm. The infamous notoriety of Norodom, and intelligence of the dreadful treatment extended to unfortunate women falling into his hands had attained even to this remote quarter of the kingdom. The threatened family was, therefore, aware of the gravity of the peril which was impending. A council of the nearest relations was hastily assembled, and flight and concealment were advised and determined upon. The father accompanied the daughter, but the son unwisely remained behind to guard and protect their home. Here was a fatal oversight, leading, as we shall see, to the frustration of their plans, and the consequent capture of Anirah.

When the royal emissary reached Atonga, he was alarmed at the flight of her he had been charged to secure. Vain were all efforts with the people to discover the place of hiding. Alompra and his family had so endeared themselves to all that none could be found to betray. Myamma, however, was a man of resource, never to be easily defeated in the accomplishment of a purpose. In this instance his action was made more prompt by the knowledge of the fate which would surely await him if compelled to return without the prize his master so eagerly coveted. He had, immediately upon ascertaining the condition of affairs, ordered the arrest

of Konesset, lest he should follow the example of the others and betake himself to tardy flight.

Arbitrary and cruel as him he served, the course most readily suggesting itself to Myamma, after general inquiry had failed, was to force the secret from the brother by torture if necessary. Konesset was, therefore, brought before him and questioned under a threat of resort to harsher means if the required information was not forthcoming. The determined attitude and firm refusal of the prisoner soon satisfied Myamma that if success was to be attained in this direction it could be reached only by methods more rigorous. His victim was, therefore, consigned to the torture. The spirit of the sufferer, however, was not weak, and the dreadful ordeal was endured with unflinching fortitude. The most cruel devices were resorted to, upon each succeeding day, to wring his frame with agony, and were persevered in so long as nature would endure. Only when life seemed about to abandon a body so bruised and torn was the torment suspended, until strength sufficient for further suffering returned. Such treatment, so full of anguish to the faithful brother, was continued during many days, but all to no purpose.

Meanwhile, tidings of Konesset's dreadful situation reached Alompra and his daughter in their place of hiding. The maiden protested against suffering him to remain longer for her sake in torture. With face flushed and voice broken by sobs, she besought the father's permission, by surrendering herself, to relieve her brother. Alompra was torn by conflicting emotions. The affection he bore toward each of his children was equal and impartial. While the present distress of the son, upon the one hand, appealed powerfully to him, the prospect

of certain degradation and eventual death to the daughter, upon the other, was even more appalling. He was, however, by reason of his creed, a fatalist, and the entreaties of Anirah were so urgent that he did not set himself absolutely against them. The consequence was, that the concealment was ended, and Alompra and his daughter gave themselves up to the representative of the king. Thus the worth and heroism of this virtuous family found conspicuous exemplification in the devoted self-sacrifice of brother and sister.

CHAPTER IX.

DEPARTURE FOR THE CAPITAL.

So soon as the maiden was secured Konesset was released from torture. He was deeply grieved to see his sister in toils, despite all he had endured to avert the calamity. His wrath and despair, too much for restraint, found vent in reckless and bitter denunciations of the tyrant Norodom, and of all who served his infamous purposes. The soldiers of the escort were enraged, and particularly Zanda, their commandant, whose temper was fiery and impulsive. Stung to fury by the imprecations of Konesset, he sought to draw his sword. Anirah, terrified, fell upon her knees before the wrathful warrior, striving to restrain the blade within its scabbard, and entreating him to spare her brother and excuse the natural outburst of his despair. The stern old soldier was not given time to grant or deny this prayer before, by virtue of superior authority, Myamma intervened.

He was cooler and more of the courtier than Zanda, and positively commanded the latter to desist.

The veteran, though nettled, was not unwilling to obey. Even without the interference of Myamma, he would himself undoubtedly have extended mercy. Though for a moment roused by the violent denunciations of Konesset, he had admired the latter for the heroism and fortitude he had shown.

Myamma was not a soldier, nor was he susceptible to the finer instincts lying beneath the blunt exterior of the commandant. The motive of his intervention was strictly politic. He had seen Anirah and been impressed with her beauty, and was convinced that, however short might be her reign, the first impression upon Norodom would be strong. Therefore, he was determined to force himself, if possible, into favor with one whose influence over his master, for a time at least, would doubtless be supreme. Uneasy lest he be held to terrible accountability for what had already been done, he seized eagerly upon this opportunity as one of at least partial reparation. He felt that, in the eyes of the victims, the necessity of the measures he had adopted, to the accomplishment of his mission, would furnish no excuse. Nor would his success arouse in the selfish bosom of Norodom the slightest spark of gratitude that might serve him as a protection.

As a further measure of conciliation, he ordered the chains stricken from the limbs of Konesset, and that every attention be given him to speed the healing of his wounds.

The second day following the occurrences just described was fixed for departure. Permission was accorded for Alompra and his son to accompany Anirah

to the capital. The injuries of Konesset, however, were so serious, and his strength so shattered, that he was unable to avail himself of the concession. The maiden pleaded earnestly for delay, at least until her brother should be sufficiently recovered to travel in a litter; but this boon, despite his desire to please, Myamma felt compelled to refuse. He was forced here to elect between conflicting perils: on one hand the possible ill-will of the fair prisoner, and the certain wrath of the king upon the other. The rainy season had just set in, and the dreadful condition of the roads would necessarily occasion loss of time before the capital could be reached. In connection with this, he remembered the impatient and reckless nature of the tyrant in whose service he was engaged. His imagination, indeed, pictured the furious despot already chafing, and he shrank from any avoidable extension of delay.

Notwithstanding his advanced age, and the precarious condition in which he was compelled to leave his son, Alompra determined to accompany his daughter. The care and healing of his other child he left, perforce, to the tender solicitude of sympathizing relatives. His presence with Anirah, in this time of peril and affliction, to guide and sustain her, was a matter of absolute necessity.

Konesset was greatly distressed by his inability to accompany his father and sister. He was, however, compelled to content himself with the determination of following at the earliest possible moment. Tender and distressing beyond the power of human language to portray was the anxious parting between the separating members of this family, so afflicted.

CHAPTER X.

EXASPERATION OF THE PEOPLE.

As the king's agents departed with their prisoners, the small city presented an aspect of deepest gloom. The houses were closed, and, with dejected air, the silent people thronged the highway. The intelligence had spread beyond the narrow limits of Atonga to the farms and settlements beyond, and these surrendered their inhabitants to swell the attendance. Among all thus gathered to witness the sad departure, there was not one whose heart was free from sorrow. The unfortunate family, now beset with perils and overwhelmed by affliction, had been the foremost benefactors in that secluded neighborhood. The venerable Alompra, now passing before them with bowed head, and mind absorbed in contemplating the misery of his children, had been for years a father to them all. The maiden Anirah, following the example of the mother before her, had been an indefatigable and tender visitor of the sick and comfortress of those in suffering and distress. Konneset, who was left behind bleeding and in pain, had ever used his courage and immense strength to restrain and subdue the oppressor and to protect the weak. By such courses, pursued without varying, had they earned and retained the affection of their neighbors, and made them participators in this sorrow.

The gathering along the road-side did not seem to please the soldiers, whose savage mien for a time repressed any active expression of feeling on the part of the people. The men in the throng maintained a grim silence, and the women, choking down their sobs,

sought to hush and restrain the children. The little ones were particularly devoted to Anirah, and, although unable fully to comprehend the situation, they felt, as though by instinct, that something dreadful was about to befall their favorite. It was, therefore, almost impossible to suppress, even partially, their cries and demonstrations, and with the passing moments the difficulty grew. Even the older heads found their feelings gaining power and intensity, as the gathering waters strive each instant more strenuously against the confining dykes.

At last a little one, more impulsive than its companions, broke suddenly from its parents, and, crying aloud, ran with open arms toward Anirah. Before, however, the child could reach its destination, the nearest soldier had seized it roughly and hurled it back with brutal violence, insensible, at the feet of its terrified mother. So great was the concussion of its fall that the open mouth and tiny nostrils of the babe crimsoned and overflowed with blood. The exclamation of the infant, however, had been contagious, and it swept away the last vestige of that restraint which the savage bearing of the soldiers had exerted. The feelings of men and women could no longer be repressed, but burst forth in a mighty outcry in which the common woe at last found utterance.

When the people beheld this brutal act, the men broke out in imprecations loud and deep, while the women with their wailings rent the air. Then from the heart of the crowd rose a voice, clear and distinct as a trumpet, calling for vengeance and the rescue of the prisoners; and the words were taken up by hundreds in tones angry and impassioned. The women,

terrified, sought safety in flight; but the men gathered in a surging mass, as though preparing for a mighty rush. The escort, drawing into close order, stood ready to meet the assault. Alompra, however, with a celerity scarcely to be expected of his age, cast himself between the threatened soldiery and the angry populace. He felt that the latter could scarcely hope for success against the arms and superior discipline of the former; and that, even if they conquered, the conflict would be murderous, and the victory eventually disastrous. Norodom would mercilessly avenge the destruction of his troop, devastating the district and exterminating its inhabitants. Earnestly, therefore, he pleaded with his infuriated neighbors, and succeeded at length in bringing them to reason, thus averting what might have been a sanguinary struggle, and to them, under any circumstances, a dreadful calamity.

Considering the usually submissive disposition of the Oriental, and the especial terrorism which at that time prevailed throughout Cambodia, this demonstration and the nature of its ending both exhibited, in the strongest light, the love in which Alompra and his children were held and the remarkable influence he wielded among the people who dwelt about him.

CHAPTER XI.

BUDDHISTIC CONSOLATION.

DESPITE the anxiety of Myamma to make up for the delay occasioned by the flight of Anirah, the journey to

the capital was not a rapid one. He had, however, taken the precaution of sending on, from the first garrisoned city on the route, swift messengers, to bear to the monarch an account of his first difficulties and eventual success, with a fervent description of the marvelous beauty of the prize.

The time consumed in the earlier stages of their travel was spent by father and daughter, so far as possible, in the exclusive society of each other. Alompra sought to comfort his child by inducing her to contemplate their affliction in a religious and philosophic spirit. Often they conversed upon the great laws which govern existence, discussing principles, the most profound of Buddhism. By this means he hoped to fortify her against the calamities which threatened her future, impressing upon her mind the inevitable character of misfortune, and bringing her up to a just appreciation of the benefits of suffering endured with proper disposition.

These discourses, however, instead of lightening the burden of Anirah's grief as they were fondly expected to do, added to the weight of her distress. The very persistence and urgency with which they were pressed evidenced to her the fact that this great sorrow was bearing heavily upon the mind and spirit of her father. The sad effect was shown, not by a lack of coherence or lucidity in idea or expression, but by a reiteration with him unusual. Each day he would go over the ground so often traversed before, apparently unconscious of repetition, and even that he had taken special care to impress these saving principles upon the minds and hearts of his children, while they were still of tender age.

“My daughter,” he would say, “existence itself is the one great misfortune, and all other calamities and bitter griefs are but accessories. Decay, dissolution, and reproduction, following in perpetual round, are its components. It is the mighty chain of triple-ply which binds us firmly to pain and sorrow, and is so difficult to sunder. It fetters us through successive births, often in number almost infinite, until at last the great sum is cast up in our favor and preponderating merit has canceled all demerit. As the lamp perpetuates the flame with its light and heat, which is taken from another, so is existence prolonged through states of being with changeful misery, enduring until doubt and ignorance are expelled, and the spirit is freed from all unkindness, vexation, and desire—when alone we may hope to accomplish its final extinction. Karma, the seed of entity, itself the fruit of our merits and demerits, springs perpetually and is difficult to eradicate; yet only through its annihilation may we expect to attain the blessed Nicban—the never-ending rest.”

“But, father,” the maiden once responded, “may we hope to reach the blessed Nicban? Ignorance we may overcome, and doubt may be dispelled, but how are men to escape the spirit of resentment which so naturally pursues the grievous wrongs they inflict upon each other? If timid and gentle animals will turn upon and rend the arrow which transfixes them, how may we hope to be able to entertain toward those who crush us only feelings of kindness and regard?”

“My child,” was the answer, “I have stated that the destruction of Karma, resulting in extinguishment of existence, constitutes a task of utmost difficulty. Many have lingered through periods of almost infinite dura-

tion, composed of successive states of being, making no progress toward the happy ending. Others, with each successive birth, have but strengthened the chain they so wearily drag. One feature of the bitter struggle is the variety of primary objects for which we are held to strive, and the accomplishment whereof is essential to success. One may find no impediment in a particular requirement which to his neighbor proves an obstacle almost insurmountable. But for each of us some of the four great paths which lead from ignorance and desire will be found beset with difficulty. Even the first of their number, tending to the realization of the vanity of all the hopes of being, and the emptiness of its apparent pleasures as well as to a comprehension of the great mystery of sorrow, binding existence inseparably to pain, is for many hard to discover. These are persons that are misled by the seeming blessings of life, and cling to them with pertinacity, despite the fact that disappointment and vexation are the only ultimate results. Others there are who see this path, and even recognize the truths to which it leads, but are so enslaved by evil passion that they can not emancipate themselves from impure desire. Others, again, yielding to temptations of the intellect, lose that control over mental faculties which all are bound to retain, and can not free themselves from doubt and heresy. Numbers allow envy, jealousy, anger, and hatred to master them, and if in power they are brutal and oppressive, and in subjection bitter and hateful—all stifling instead of cultivating that sublime charity so absolutely enjoined by the Enlightened One.

“Thou, my child, seemest at this moment inclined toward feelings of resentment against those who have

imposed these bitter wrongs upon us. Beware, oh, my daughter, of harboring such a sentiment, because it is as fatal to the hope of blessed Nirvana as heresy could be, or even unholy appetite itself. Look rather upon these calamities as impressive lessons, from which to draw that wisdom which is essential to the destruction of Karma. So considered, they will aid thee in overcoming desire, and thereby advancing far along the road to that obliteration which alone is happiness."

CHAPTER XII.

THE PRINCIPLES OF BUDDHA.

SUCH was the character of the conversations usually, through the persistence of Alompra, springing up between himself and his daughter after the journey of each day was done. They were generally protracted until darkness was almost fallen and the dampness of the night commenced to make itself perceptible. Then Anirah would become anxious lest its vapors, often poisoned as they were by the miasma of the lowlands, should affect her father. She saw that he was failing under hardships endured at a time of life when age unfitted him for the burden. When, therefore, this hour had come, firmly, but with tenderness and respect, she would interrupt the venerable Alompra, that by rest and slumber he might recuperate for the labors of the morrow.

Although usually she abstained from interposing in any way, Anirah, nevertheless, upon a few occasions

ventured on an expression of the thoughts presenting themselves as she listened dutifully to his discourses.

“Father,” she once replied, “I am sometimes tempted to doubt whether existence itself be so essentially wedded to misfortune and sorrow, and to believe that intrinsically it may be a blessing, but poisoned or made nugatory by the vicious nature and conduct of men. To my mind comes the recollection of the many days of happiness in our peaceful home at Atonga before the cruel king brought desolation to our house. The thought will force itself upon me that it is not by reason of any law of entity itself that we endure these great calamities, but rather to the wickedness of man alone are they attributable.”

“My daughter,” the father made answer, “to one who did not know thee well these remarks might give rise to the painful suspicion that thou hast not yet entered upon the first of the great paths that lead to Nicban—the path which brings us at last to the utter condemnation of being. As it is, thou mayest not hope to escape temptation, the natural result of the weakness of our nature, and the habits, perhaps, of centuries of preceding existence. But thou canst, and I believe dost, resist its insidious advances, never permitting the will to capitulate. In regarding the apparent felicity of our past condition, close thy mind against the heightening influence of present deprivation and of contrast. The fact that a particular state has passed away, perhaps for ever, often suffices to awaken within us regret for its departure. So, whatever are the seeming blessings of the present, they are held inferior to those of the past. Thus is the enjoyment of the hour often impaired by recollection and vain regret, while our impressions of

the evils at the moment pressing upon us are always more vivid than the remembrance of those from which we are relieved.

“ Our family circle has been frequently stricken with disease and broken by death ; and, as mother and children were swept away, there were pangs which counterbalanced much of joy. Each left a void never to be filled, and a regret which time softened only, but never removed. Nor can I fail to remember how ever-present was anxious fear lest our number, already so reduced, should be again infringed upon ; a contingency which, considering my own advancing age and accumulating infirmities, has been for years almost impending.

“ As with us, so it has ever been and will be with others ; for there is no joy which does not serve as a foundation upon which rests the sure promise of a sorrow. The happiest unions must be severed, and every birth but paves the way for death. All pleasure, falling short of anticipation, is closely linked to disappointment, and poisoned by a sense of its ephemeral nature, while it leaves behind it a legacy of regret. On the other hand, countless are the miseries of the human lot, which bear with them no balm of healing, and give promise of no resulting joy.

“ Furthermore, my daughter, the vices of mankind are themselves sources of pain and sorrow, by virtue of the law, and they are more prolific of distress than poverty or disease, or even death itself. We are so bound together by existence that we can not escape suffering from the evil natures and wicked actions of our fellows any more than we may avoid the bitter consequences of our own. It is one of the great laws of being that men, so long as they have life, shall serve as scourges unto each

other, as well as tormenters of themselves. And the principle pursues us through every stage of transmigration ; for the beasts and reptiles of the earth and its insects, the birds of the air, and the fish that swim the sea, all afflict and destroy among themselves.

“As we can not place ourselves beyond the reach of poverty, infirmity, or dissolution, so are we equally powerless to escape the persecutions of the wicked, ever, as they are, seeking the accomplishment of evil designs at the expense of their fellow-men. It is noticeable that the nearer we are to immunity from the assaults of particular ills, the more exposed we are to the attack of others. Those who are destitute or profoundly miserable seldom present a mark for the malice or envy of their neighbors, while, on the other hand, beauty, wealth, or other good fortune, excites against us the corrupt passions of our kind, some of whom, in time, will find the means of inflicting calamity upon us, if indeed they do not compass our entire ruin.”

“Dear father,” Anirah rejoined, “all that thou hast taught me I do most firmly believe, and I am glad that thou judgest me so well. Of course I know that, even if we may speculate where the Enlightened One has spoken, we are not of ourselves able to determine whether existence be for good or evil, because the problem involves factors beyond our reach.

“In such inquiries the dealing should be with all ; taking into account the joys of life as against its woes, and endeavoring to determine which have exceeded. Many, no doubt, have less of sorrow, while others have misery in its darkest hues. The history of no particular individual could determine the great question, involving, as it does, the entire race, and, in fact, all animate creation.

“ All of this is certainly beyond the comprehension of the human mind, and men must grope in darkness, speculating and in doubt, unless relying upon faith alone ; they accept, without question, the teachings of Him that is Enlightened, and depend solely upon the abundance of his wisdom. Therefore, dear father, what the blessed Gautama has declared to us, that do I firmly believe.

“ But some natures there may be with whom, at least in this state of humanity, the love and tender consideration of father and mother, brother and sister, do more than counterbalance the distresses and misfortunes of earlier years ; while, during later ones, the added affection and devotion of kind spouses, the respect and obedience of dutiful children, would increase largely the score of life’s blessings. Even death itself from such things can not pluck all the joy, but must leave behind tender and pleasing recollections.

“ As for myself, I am tempted to think that, in my own experience, were it not for the present calamity which, while it crushes me, strikes with equal force the hearts of those I love, the happiness of the past alone would go far toward outweighing the evils of the future.”

CHAPTER XIII.

EVIL OF EXISTENCE.

ANIRAH regretted the last expression the moment it was uttered. She saw passing over the venerable countenance of her father, as a light cloud over the expanse

of the heavens, a slight expression of anxiety. In a second, however, it was gone, and his face once more was serene and calm. The suspicion had momentarily presented itself to Alompra that, perchance, all his earnest teachings had been vain and profitless; that, after all, there lingered within her heart a fondness for life and its illusory enjoyments so much at variance with the sentiments which should possess the true and devoted follower of the sage Gautama. Such, however, was the confidence he reposed in his children, that the thought found no lodgment in his mind, and he believed implicitly the declaration of Anirah relative to the fixity of her faith.

“My child,” in his kindest tones the father said, “it is difficult to bring youth to the full appreciation of the noble truths of Buddhism. Its buoyant spirit wages vigorous battle against trouble and misfortune, and may, for a time, succeed in breaking the force of their attack; but, as the years pass, we tire of the struggle, and sorrows press more heavily and victoriously upon us. In early life there is also the powerful ally Hope, which, with whispered promises for the future, distracts the mind from the evils of the present, and makes them easier to bear. As maturity and age, however, come to us, disappointment dulls the ear to her voice, rendering the spirit insensible to her inspirations, until, at last, she herself deserts us, leaving behind naught but bitter disappointment. Then, at least, should men recognize the vanity of all these seeming blessings, and, estimating properly the hateful character of existence, come to sigh for oblivion and rest. The difficulty, however, is, that, by permitting the best years of our human span to pass in a manner of life unwise and sinful, we increase greatly

the sum of our demerits, and acquire stubborn habits of thought and ways of living that are not to be altered with ease.

“You consider the tribulation now oppressing us as unusual, and, therefore, of doubtful application; yet there are in Cambodia thousands of families made wretched by outrages such as that by which we are now afflicted. Nor are such crushing misfortunes peculiar to this land alone, for among all races, in all quarters of the earth, there usually falls in every life some great calamity to poison existence and render it accursed. The guises such mischance may assume are myriad. One reared in wealth is suddenly cast into penury, for which his earlier training has absolutely unfitted him. A husband discovers the infidelity of his best beloved, or a parent feels the sting of a child’s unthankfulness. Thus might the sad catalogue be continued almost indefinitely.

“To each sufferer the conclusion is natural, that his particular lot is exceptionally severe, and that, but for the dark shadow of its one crowning disaster, existence might have been fair and joyful. Such reflections, so apt to present themselves, but serve to increase the bitterness of the woe and lend intensity to suffering. The brighter picture, appearing to the imagination, by contrast heightens the somber gloom of that which actually exists.

“Moreover, my child, the peace that dwelt with us in Atonga is not universally given to families. Parents and children, brothers and sisters, and spouses, among themselves too often live in strife and confusion, being to each other grievous and enduring torments, rather than sources of happiness and contentment.”

What Alompra had said relative to the whisperings of Hope in youthful ears was not wholly inapplicable to his own gentle and beautiful daughter. Although sensible of the gravity of her peril, and deeply grieved by what had already befallen those she loved so dearly, and what yet remained threatening them for the future, yet her buoyant spirit was not without its moments of hopefulness. At times, as her thoughts strayed, led away by the imagination, she would find them picturing herself as in some manner become the reformer of the vices of the king, and of the grievous evils afflicting the people of Cambodia. Then, in fancy, she would see her aged father spending his last days in quiet and contentment, and her brother, advanced to high position in the state, joyful and prosperous. Soon, however, these wanderings of the mind would come to an end, and common sense would tell how hollow were these visions, and utterly hopeless of realization. Nevertheless, the few bright moments during which they possessed her imagination were moments of pleasure. Although when judgment resumed its sway they crumbled at its touch, yet their recollection served to dull the keen edge of her despair.

After the conversation last recited, the daughter . abstained from again giving utterance to the ideas that suggested themselves as her mind was forced to dwell upon the grave questions so often the subject of her father's discourses. Thus was Alompra permitted, without interruption, to comment upon the principles of Buddhism, and in such manner that his speeches assumed the character of set dissertations. This seemed to him eminently satisfactory, and he was pleased with the earnest attention accorded by the dutiful Anirah,

whom he fondly considered as possessing all the disposition essential to the early attainment of blessed Nirvana.

CHAPTER XIV.

DEATH OF ALOMPRA.

MUCH time had been consumed, and great fatigue been undergone, and yet Myamma found himself and party still distant from the capital. Their progress had been exceedingly slow, although most laborious.

The journey so far had been one of hardship and exposure, trying severely the endurance even of the young and vigorous. To Alompra, therefore, well stricken in years, with a constitution that had already borne the strain of more than three quarters of a century, the toil was beyond his powers. Nevertheless, the strong love he bore his child, seconded by an indomitable will, had for a time, at least apparently, supported him against the fatigues of the way and the inclemency of the weather. Had the march been less protracted, he might have accomplished it without serious injury or suffering. As it was, his strength was failing beneath unwonted hardships thus accumulated upon him. This decline was not sudden, but yet to the anxious Anirah its approach from the commencement had been distressingly noticeable. As he rode beside her, upon the huge elephant, she observed with tender solicitude the aspect of his countenance and the carriage of his body. Upon the former, despite an evident struggle to conceal it, came and finally settled

the haggard look of weariness and distress. His bearing, notwithstanding efforts to the contrary, grew less erect, and his shoulders would droop and his head fall at times even upon his bosom. Soon he began more rapidly to fail, his weakness growing day by day more apparent, until at length he was utterly unable to ride beside his daughter. Then, by order of Myamma, he was placed in a litter borne by soldiers of the escort. Even with this attention his strength continued on the wane, and it was evident that his days were numbered.

Now again did Anirah plead for delay, begging for rest until her father should recuperate, or, at all events, close his eyes in peace and quiet. Myamma found himself again in a painful dilemma. To refuse seemed inhuman, and would certainly, he imagined, secure for him the animosity and resentment of the fair petitioner. On the other hand, he was still more terrified by the prospect of offending the fierce tyrant who, sending him upon this mission, had cautioned him menacingly against delay. Tendering to the weeping suppliant the most profuse apologies, hoping thus to avert her anger, he felt compelled to refuse the boon so earnestly solicited, advancing as his excuse the peremptory character of his orders, and endeavoring, so far as it could be done with safety, to cast upon his master the responsibility of this denial. All, however, that could be done, under the circumstances, to alleviate the condition and sufferings of the invalid, was speedily and zealously performed.

Before this, the journey had been to Anirah one of anxiety and terror, aggravated by uncertainty as to the fate eventually awaiting her ; but so far she had been upheld by the consciousness of having always by her

one upon whom she might rely for sympathy, if not protection. Now, in view of the approaching bereavement, separating her, as it would, from the last hope of help, or even encouragement, the prospect for the future became more dark and appalling. Before, the peril which threatened had seemed yet distant; but now it appeared as though drawn nigh by a sudden leap until become actually impending and about to overwhelm her.

The head-waters of the Sesupon were reached, where the barges awaited to float them down its current and across the great Lake of Thalè-Sap to the place of destination. Although this mode of traveling was far more easy even than that by litter, Alompra continued on the decline until they had come to a spot within a few days' journey of the capital. Then it was evident that his end was indeed at hand. As night was falling, the signs of approaching dissolution became more grave. The eyes were sunken, and the outlines of the face were giving way. The skin was drawn and parched, and in places discolored, while the breathing was slow and labored. Thus matters continued, while, at the side of the rude couch improvised for his comfort, the afflicted Anirah watched, weeping silently, so as not to disturb the dying man, and expecting every moment the spirit to take its flight. His, however, was no ordinary vitality, and life within its citadel stood stubborn siege.

Toward the middle of the night he fell into a lethargy deep and deathlike, from which, as the dawn appeared, he awoke in delirium. His disordered intellect seemed to harbor but two trains of thought, one relating to the principles of his faith, and the other to the great peril menacing his daughter. Even over these

the mind possessed but slight control, for he would suddenly and with incoherence pass from one to the other. Even the sentences themselves were broken, commencing at times with matters of religion and terminating in ejaculations of commiseration and distress over the fate of the child that sorrowed beside him.

Later, still another change came over him, and as he lay, almost incapable of motion, his features would light up with radiant smiles, and he would fondly call his dead wife, Madotta, and the children who had been taken from him, mingling their names with those of Anirah and Konesset. His disordered fancy had evidently brought back the happy days of the past, ere death had invaded his household; and, in imagination, he was surrounded by the beloved spouse of his youth, and all the sons and daughters that had blessed their nuptials.

The sun rose above the horizon, and yet life held out, although the dying man was sinking still. As the bright luminary of the day mounted toward the zenith, as slowly did existence ebb away. Repeatedly the spirit seemed to have flown for ever, when suddenly it would rally and appear to renew the mortal struggle, as though over the body striving to retain its fleeting dominion. At last it did pass away, but so gently that Anirah felt for a moment at a loss to determine whether what she beheld was sleep or death.

CHAPTER XV.

EARLY INCLINATIONS OF ALOMPRA.

THAT the doctrines of Buddhism should have maintained to the last a firm hold upon the mind and heart of the dead man was not astonishing. His own father, Notamu, had, toward the latter years of his life, joined the Sacred Order of Mendicants, which is the nearest approach that true Buddhism makes to a regular priesthood. It purports to be an association of devotees who leave the world, seeking to cast loose the ties that bind the heart of man to life. They strive to banish all desire, and to cultivate within themselves the holy dispositions. The complex rules of the society are framed to guard against vanity, frivolity, and evil, in thought or act, and to eradicate all attachment for person, thing, or being. By the strict observance of its canons, with the assistance also of frequent meditation upon the precepts and wisdom of Gautama, the members of this religious brotherhood hope to escape metempsychosis, with its successions of pain and sorrow, in ever-varying guises, and to obtain the happy rest of utter extinction. Secular life is surrounded by temptations calculated to strengthen the aspirations which stand as barriers in the way of spiritual progress, and force the minds of men toward those sinful fancies and wrongful deeds which turn back the soul upon its weary journey. These temptations the mendicants endeavor, by seclusion, to evade, barring from their monasteries, as well as from their lives, all that is calculated to influence to sin, or to foster the love of existence, and of the things of life, for only upon the attainment of absolute purity

of thought and act, and of a condition of utter and universal indifference, can men hope to merit the blessed Nirvana.

Notamu, before taking a step so serious, and one in which others as well as himself were interested, had given the matter long and careful consideration. His wife was devoted to him, and his son, though young, was intelligent and thoughtful, and both were taken into fullest confidence and a share in the deliberation. He had imbued them with the precepts of the faith, and, therefore, they believed with him that the contemplated course lay in the highest line of duty and was most promotive of the true welfare of the husband and father. With such convictions, the affection they bore him precluded captious or selfish opposition. He had not, however, abandoned his family in the more objectionable sense of that term, because he had delayed many years the accomplishment of his purpose, until his son was almost grown, and he himself, by industry and economy, had accumulated a competence for those he loved.

The discourses so often held between Alompra and his father, during the period preceding the seclusion of the latter, had made a deep impression upon the boy. So profound, indeed, it was, that even before Notamu himself had retired from the world, within his own breast, the son felt the same yearning for a life of abnegation and self-perfection. This sentiment grew stronger day by day, until it acquired at length such force that no sooner had he attained to man's estate than he was impelled to prefer to his mother the same request his father had submitted before him.

When to the prayer of Notamu the wife had given

tearful consent, her acquiescence was dictated more by unselfish love than by conviction of the judgment. She had determined to render up her own happiness upon the altar of her husband's welfare, willing, for his sake, to spend the remainder of her days in the seclusion and sorrow of what practically was widowhood. When, however, within a comparatively short time after this first great deprivation, came the solicitation of her son, it was more even than her disinterestedness could endure. Therefore, almost piteously, she begged her son to stay with her during her few remaining years. Alompra was deeply moved by her earnest protest, and regretted exceedingly having pained her by a suggestion which, upon second thought, seemed cruel and unthinking. The intensity of his zeal and the fierceness of the craving that was in him must have been extreme indeed thus to have driven him to be, even for a moment, unmindful of her claims, and to forget how great was the sacrifice he had demanded.

The love he bore his mother was strong, and he resolved to postpone his purpose and devote his life, so long as necessary, to her comfort and care.

CHAPTER XVI.

STORY OF MADOTTA.

ABOUT this time Alompra's maternal uncle, residing in a neighboring province, had departed, as was his custom, and according to the exigencies of his occupation, with one of the annual caravans conducting the

trade to China. This caravan was guarded, as usual, and it transported valuable gums and resins and fragrant woods; with ivory and precious metals from the mines of the interior; jewels and stones of price from Hindostan—all constituting a charge of immense value. It so happened that, during its progress, it was subjected to a determined attack by a strong force of bandits, such as swarmed in those days through the mountains and valleys of Cambodia. After a desperate conflict the robbers were repulsed, but in the affray Alompra's uncle lost his life.

He left no widow, and but three children. Of these the oldest, a son, had gone some years before upon a distant voyage by sea, and had not yet returned. The others were of tender age. There was one more member of this family—a younger sister of the dead mother of the orphans. The name of the girl was Madotta, and in years she was little advanced beyond the elder of the children that were with her; but toward them she had long been compelled to perform a maternal part.

Receiving intelligence of this calamity, Alompra's mother, who was a woman of warm heart, resolved to send for these unprotected ones and adopt them into her family. Accordingly, she dispatched her son to bring them to her, and they had been escorted safely to Atonga. There they were received with cordial but sorrowful welcome, and ever afterward they were treated as children of the house. Alompra, feeling deeply for their misfortune, demeaned himself toward them as a gentle and loving brother. The boys were too young to be companions for him. Madotta, however, although little older than they, by reason of her sex and the grave responsibilities that had been so early

forced upon her was far more mature, and in mind strong beyond her years. In her, therefore, he had an associate most agreeable—one intelligent, and at the same time simple in manners and amiable in disposition. Without dreaming of consequences, he spent many of his spare hours in her society, and the association was pleasant to them both. Thus stood matters until Madotta entered into the state of transformation from sweet girlhood into sweeter womanhood. As is usually the case in lands of the Orient, the transition was rapid. Day by day, and almost visibly, the form filled and rounded, until the outlines and proportions of a lovely woman—most exquisite in nature—were assumed. The luster of the eyes grew deeper and stronger, and the features took on the lines and curves of an attractive maturity.

Of this pleasing metamorphosis Alompra was an interested witness, observing with delight and astonishment each charm as it developed. At the same time he was conscious of a change in progress within himself, at least so far as his feelings toward the maiden were concerned. The pleasure he now felt in her society was not so sober as before. It grew to be a joy, eager and intense. Separation from her became irksome and unbearable. Do what he might, his eyes would constantly seek and rest with pleasure upon her face and form, and she came to be the perpetual subject of his thoughts. Even his periods of slumber were filled with visions of pleasure, of which the blooming Madotta was ever the central figure.

Had he been at all versed in affairs of the heart, he would have perceived in his lovely companion changes other than mere physical ones. He might have noticed

that she, as well as himself, sought, now more than ever, to multiply and prolong their hours of association; that her eyes no longer met his with the bold frankness of former days, but fell before his frequent and admiring glances; and that, beneath his gaze, in her cheeks the rich blood would ebb and flow with enchanting and rapid alternation.

Thus matters continued until the transformation was complete, and Madotta had developed into a mature and beautiful woman. So they might have longer remained had not Alompra's mother been stricken with disease, and, after a brief but painful illness, passed away.

Meanwhile the elder brother of the orphans, so long absent, returned, having in foreign lands amassed great wealth. He was in every way prepared to care for his relatives, and relieve Alompra from the administration of the means the father had left, and which had been preserved and increased by honorable and successful management.

At last Alompra considered himself free to accomplish the holy purpose so long delayed—of joining the Sacred Brotherhood of Mendicants. He found, however, that the prospect of religious seclusion did not seem now so inviting as it had done in former years. On the contrary, thoughts of Madotta pressed upon him almost to its utter exclusion. They filled his heart with a joy that tempted him powerfully to repugnance toward the life which, whatever might be its righteousness, would separate him from his lovely associate and compel her banishment from his thoughts. Through the instrumentality of this struggle he awakened to a consciousness of the character of his own

sentiments toward the maiden ; but he was yet ignorant of the fact that his affection was reciprocated in all its fervor.

His faith was strong, and his will of iron ; and so, notwithstanding the love with which his bosom was rent, he held firmly to his original determination. He believed that to him it pointed out the path of duty. In such a course, he thought the well-being of no one but himself involved ; for, in view of his fixed purpose, he had scrupulously abstained, so far as lay in his power, from disclosing to the maiden the nature of his feelings toward her. For himself, he hoped that time and separation from the object of his devotion would quell the bitter struggle of his heart and liberate him entirely from the passion. At all events, he would strive manfully against it, trusting that through an ordeal so fierce he might earn an accumulation of merit sufficient to warrant the expectation that, at least with one more birth, he would overcome the balance of demerit, evidently brought down from prior states of being, and at last accomplish the blessed Nirvana.

Therefore, imitating the example of his Sacred Master, the august Gautama, without warning or adieu to any of his household, and in the dead hours of night, he took his departure.

CHAPTER XVII.

STORY OF MADOTTA (CONCLUDED).

ALOMPRA had sought admission and been accepted into the same monastery which had afforded a shelter

to his father. Notamu, however, had died some time before, and so was not there to receive and welcome his son. The latter entered with earnest zeal into the spirit of the order, observing strictly its rules and mandates, and going even beyond these in the measure of his devotion and abnegation. Nevertheless, the task he had undertaken was most difficult. He found no trouble in releasing himself from other desires and ambitions of life, but toward Madotta, the object of its devotion, his heart would turn with mighty yearning. Before his imagination her figure, beautiful and enticing, would rise, and at his bidding it would not depart. Against all of this he waged war, loyal and unremitting; but the contest was close, and love would often seem about to claim the victory. On such occasions, as though no more could be endured, and his high calling must be abandoned, he would arise and take his way toward the outer gates; but then the will would exert its fullest force, and duty be again triumphant.

The strain of such perpetual warfare was disastrous to his health, and it wore him until he became lean and gaunt—more like a shadow than substance. He lost wholesome and sufficient sleep, becoming nervous and restless as the winds. These threatening symptoms were to him a source of no anxiety or displeasure. He was fully convinced that so long as life remained his passion would live with him, and that his days of the future, like those of the past, were destined to bitter and consuming struggle. It was, therefore, with complacency that he viewed the near approach of death to terminate his misery, and advance him upon the path to Nirvana.

Meanwhile Madotta had fared no better, suffering

greatly in consequence of the departure of Alompra. Finding him gone, she was overwhelmed with woe, having come to love him as earnestly as she was herself beloved. She was lonely and inconsolable. The days were blank and dreary, and her nights were periods of unrest. The sweet smile that had been at home upon her face was there no more, and her eyes were swollen by perpetual weeping. Tears, however, themselves a blessed relief to the burdened heart, were after a time denied her, and her misery became more profound. Her form wasted and lost its shape and fullness, and her eyes their wonted luster. From the complexion, brilliancy departed, and the features fell away from the graceful curves and lines that formerly had been theirs. Nephews and friends, becoming seriously alarmed, sought to fathom the mystery of her ailment; but she resisted all inquiries, and refused to reveal the secret. At last, becoming absolutely too weak to rise from her couch, she lay still wasting and about to die. Then, believing her last moments had come, she called to her bedside the elder of the boys with whom she had grown up, and in accents almost inaudible said to him :

“I feel that I am about to die. When I am dead thou mayest seek Alompra and tell him that I loved him, and without him could not live.”

The youth, much affected, promised obedience, and Madotta, seeming gratified, was quiet and silent. He, however, possessing judgment and determination, resolved to communicate at once with Alompra, hoping the latter might return and thus save the life of the beloved aunt. Fearing by his own absence to excite, upon her part, suspicion and inquiry, he dispatched his

youngest brother upon the mission. The latter, losing no time, reached the monastery and delivered the solemn message of Madotta.

Himself weak and shattered, the effect of this astounding communication upon Alompra was overwhelming. As he received it, unable to render a word of reply, he fell insensible at the feet of the messenger. Conveyed to his cell, the tender ministrations of his brethren soon restored him to consciousness. After revival, the debate within him was short and speedily determined. So long as he believed himself alone concerned, his resolve had been fixed beyond power of change, and the struggle that love was perpetually waging within him, while infinitely distressing, was absolutely vain. Now, like a revelation, broke upon him, for the first time, the knowledge that the happiness and even the life of her he loved had been involved, and lay, possibly at this very moment, in his hands. His was in every respect a noble nature, self-sacrificing and unselfish. Therefore, although in so doing he felt that he impaired, if in fact by surrendry he did not entirely abandon the merit of the stubborn battle he had been maintaining, he resolved to hasten at once to the relief of the suffering maiden. He knew that he was riveting to himself more firmly the chain of existence, thereby postponing the attainment of Nirvana ; but yet, for her sake, he would not hesitate to doom himself to continuing metempsychosis, through ten thousand successive states of being, with all their component miseries. He reached her side in time to check the soul's flight, and at her bed of suffering they pledged each other their vows of love ; and Madotta survived to be a tender and devoted wife and the mother of his children.

CHAPTER XVIII.

LAMENTATION OF ANIRAH.

ALTHOUGH Anirah had been in momentary expectation of the death of her venerable and beloved father, yet, when the distressing calamity actually befell, she was unable to meet it with even the appearance of composure. The moment she was fully convinced that life had passed away, a sorrow heavier than ever overwhelmed her soul, and she cast herself, sobbing, upon the bosom of the dead.

The people of the camp, attracted by these sounds of anguish, in brutal curiosity gathered about and within the entrance of the tent in which was Anirah with the lifeless body of Alompra.

This the maiden, immersed in grief, did not perceive ; but she lay, despite the rude intrusion, moaning and weeping in the agony of her soul. At this moment Zanda, the commandant of the troop, was attracted to the spot. Although a rough soldier, drawn originally from the lowest classes, and risen from the ranks by years of faithful service, notwithstanding his rugged exterior and the training he had received, making him swift to anger, he possessed a heart that was warm, and usually gentle and considerate. On this occasion he had the tact and good sense to perceive at once the impropriety of permitting the sorrow of this stricken daughter to become thus a spectacle for the brutish crowd. In angry and peremptory tones he ordered the loiterers away, and stood himself, sometimes apart, as a sentinel against further intrusion.

It was long before Anirah was able to control her

voice or stay the course of the bursting sobs that rent her bosom. At last, however, she succeeded partially, and was enabled as well to command her thoughts. Then she found relief in giving subdued utterance to her woe.

“Oh, my dear father !” she murmured, “how hard it had been to lose thee, even in the dear old homestead, where thy last moments would have been attended by son and daughter, both of whom loved thee so truly, and owed so much to thy constant and tender solicitude ; and by grieving relatives and friends, so many of whom thou hast benefited by wise counsel and assisted by timely benefactions ! How dreadful, almost beyond endurance, to have seen thee die thus, far away from home, and in a land of strangers and desolation, surrounded not by loving hearts, but by enemies to thee and thine ; thy last moments not peaceful, but beset by perils and encompassed by tribulations ! Who could have conceived that a life like thine, an example of purity and honor, would have been brought to such a close ? Alas ! how bitter must have been the parting reflection that thou wast about to go from a helpless child, in the very height of her necessity, when, above all other times, she needed most thy counsel and protection ! Without thee, how will she face the future, so dark and threatening ? How true indeed were thy discourses upon the wretchedness of existence ! Oh, that I could have died, as thou hast done, although not worthy to abide with thee in the future states of holiness to which thy virtues have entitled thee !”

Thus, alternated with spells of sobbing, for some time such murmured and broken exclamations of sorrow and despair were continued, as though Anirah were

pouring a lamentation into the ears of the dead. To pursue the description of a scene so full of anguish would be to distress the reader, and it were well to drop the curtain gently upon the maiden and her grief.

Myamma, the king's envoy, found himself placed by the death of Alompra in a position of difficulty. He was well aware of the capricious nature of Norodom's temper, and that the question of his approval of any particular act depended solely upon the humor in which he was found. The apprehensive courtier was therefore at a loss to determine upon the course to be pursued in relation to the body of the deceased. To dispose of it without what the daughter might consider due respect would, in his judgment, be an offense unpardonable in her eyes, and one which, in a short time, she would doubtless be abundantly able to avenge. On the other hand, in a land like Cambodia, of strictest ceremonial, it would be a crime almost beyond absolving to accord to the dead honors greater than those to which his station entitled him. Were the law in this instance violated, the captious monarch might not overlook it, but, on the contrary, would doubtless visit upon the perpetrator the severest penalties. For these reasons Myamma was perplexed, and saw no way out of the embarrassment except to embalm the remains and bear them with him to the capital, thus casting upon the king himself the determination of the question. Even this course suggested dangers to the wary mind of Norodom's cautious emissary; but, after earnest deliberation, he adopted it as the best solution of the difficulty.

As soon as he could do so with propriety, he communicated this design to Anirah, who, still dazed by her great bereavement, interposed no objection. A pro-

fessional embalmer was sent for to the nearest village of sufficient consequence to maintain one. As the distance was considerable, many hours elapsed before his arrival. When he did come, the first fury of Anirah's sorrow had expended itself, and all was prepared for the performance of the offices for which he had been summoned.

His first operation was to wash the corpse carefully in warm water. Then, habited in white, the color of mourning, it laid for a while at rest upon a mat. It was not long, however, until the embalmer was prepared for further proceeding. From the body of the dead man the viscera were removed. Through holes perforated in the bottom of the feet, and extending up into the calves, pieces of bamboo were introduced, to allow the fluids to escape, which, by pressure, they were forced to do. When, to a considerable extent, these liquids were removed, in the cavities, whence the viscera had been taken, were placed honey and rich gums and spices, with perfumed oils of rose and sandal-wood, and the dust of eagle-wood, with that of other odoriferous shrubs and trees. When this was accomplished, the remains were swathed in folds of varnished cloth and the whole encased in beeswax, whereof the exterior surface over the face and feet was wrought to resemblance with the deceased. These parts, so molded, were covered with gilt, and the corpse was then deposited in a coffin, richly ornamented, whereupon the offices of the embalmer were completed, and the body was in condition for transportation to the capital.

CHAPTER XIX.

ADORNMENT OF ANIRAH.

THE calamitous journey of Anirah was accomplished at last. It was toward evening that the party reached its destination; and the maiden, trembling and unwilling, was led to the palace. There she was consigned to the care of the women of the household, whose duty it was to prepare her for presentation to the king. By his command, these were to lave her with costly perfumes, to array her in garments of richest stuff, and to adorn her with gems the most precious in the treasury.

She, however, worn by the toil of travel, earnestly besought the women to postpone, until the following morning, the performance of their offices, that she might rest before being called upon to undergo the trying ordeal of submitting to the royal inspection. The attendants, knowing well the character of their master, did not dare, upon their own responsibility, to accede to this request. Neither were they willing to bear to him a demand which might be at variance with his wishes. It was only when the prayer of Anirah was pressed more urgently, that one of their number at last agreed to approach the tyrant. She accordingly sought him, and, trembling, delivered the message as coming from the maiden, taking occasion also to extol her many and surpassing charms. Somewhat to the astonishment of the woman, the petition was granted without question or hesitation. Of Anirah the king had taken a secret view as she entered the palace, and he had been deeply impressed; and he was, therefore, willing to propitiate her.

Accordingly, Anirah was conducted to a chamber sumptuously appointed, where, sinking into a soft couch, she was overcome by fatigue and exhaustion, and fell into slumber most profound. During the entire night her sleep continued, and she awoke invigorated and refreshed. Shortly after her awakening, the attendants who had received her the evening before again presented themselves, prepared to execute the sovereign's mandate.

Divested of all apparel, she was led to the bath and thoroughly laved in tepid water. Now, her person was gently sprinkled with a fragrant mist of sensuous perfume, prepared with all the consummate skill and cunning of Oriental manufacture. Then was cast over her a tunic of silk, fine-spun and rich, attractively figured in patterns of flowers and running vines, delicate and graceful. Passing over the shoulder and under the opposite arm was placed a silken scarf, large and handsome, harmonizing in color with the garment upon which it rested. The surface of these vestments was overwrought with gems. Encircling her magnificent neck and each splendid arm were bands of heavy gold, in chain-work of wonderful intricacy and greatest beauty. The low sandals, out of which two exquisite ankles and the high insteps rose, graceful and like arches of gold, were sown thickly with seed-pearls and diamonds of small size ; all like a beautiful fretwork of frosted ice. The hair, long, abundant, and silken, carefully cut and dressed with fragrant oils, was trained upon the top of the stately head, where it rested in shape like the full-blown flower of the lotus.

Faithfully and diligently had the attendants complied with the orders of their master ; and from their

hands Anirah came forth more lovely than the rose, and more fragrant than the violet. Being a woman, the nature of her womanhood asserted itself; for, when her toilet was complete, despite her fear and the agitation of her feelings, she was fully conscious of her charms, and in them felt a momentary sentiment of pride and satisfaction. Such feelings were abundantly justified, for, as she stood, never before had Cambodia beheld a maiden of such magnificent beauty.

CHAPTER XX.

NORODOM IN LOVE.

THUS decorated and attired, Anirah was led to the expectant Norodom. He, spurred by the glowing eulogies that reached him from all quarters, and by his own glimpse, hastily taken, was, for the first time in his career, anxious and careful to produce a favorable impression upon the woman that was marked as his victim. With a view to furthering this object, by rendering the occasion impressive, he had selected the Grand Hall of Audiences as the place of meeting. This was an apartment high and broad, its walls hung with tapestries of rich material and elegant design. The ceiling was supported upon rows of gilded columns, carved throughout their length with leaves and flowers, and the heads of birds and animals. About, on the outskirts of the chamber, upon pedestals of ebony, sat golden images of Buddha and of the principal deities worshiped in Cambodia.

Toward one end, stretched across this great hall, hung a magnificent curtain of golden tissue, while the floor itself was covered with mat-work of purest silver, woven in strands thick and heavy. At the side farthest from this screen the audience-chamber was entirely unclosed, the breezes of the morning entered pleasant and free, and charged with fragrant odors from the gardens below. Beyond and through this opening, in agreeable perspective, could be seen the groves and temples and palaces of the city.

Sweet strains of music burst upon the ears of Anirah as she was ushered into the spacious apartment; and to such harmonious accompaniment the golden veil was slowly drawn aside.

The portion of the Place of Audiences which the curtain marked off for royalty was far more richly furnished than the rest. The tapestry upon its walls was most costly, and the columns more elaborately carved, while the mat-work upon the floor was of plaited gold.

Here Norodom was revealed, seated upon a raised platform, or throne, constructed and adorned, with exquisite taste, of ivory and ebony in beautiful contrast. Its cushions and hangings were of crimson velvet, overwrought with silver. Upon this the monarch sat, leaning slightly upon an extended arm and hand that rested beside him. On his head was the great crown of Cambodia, rising like a miniature dome, surmounted by a spire, all built of large and rarest gems. The tapering point in turn supported the capital stone, a diamond of immense size and purest water. Around his waist a golden girdle ran, close-woven and with circular disk in front. Across the back and shoulders, to the chest, extended another band of plaited gold, supporting a breast-

piece of the same, highly burnished, and embossed with precious stones. Curving up from either shoulder, to diamond-tipped points, in duly proportioned heights, rose demi-crescents of rich material, profusely jeweled. The Great Hall of Audiences had been cleared under orders of the king, and alone he sat. It was his desire that the interview between himself and the maiden should have no witnesses. Sentinels had accordingly been placed through all the adjoining corridors and neighboring grounds with drawn swords; and their instructions were to strike off the head of any who had not sought or kept their quarters.

As Anirah entered, the attendants removed her sandals, for it was not lawful that a subject should appear in presence of the sovereign with other than uncovered feet. Then the women retired precipitately, leaving their beautiful charge. When the curtain rolled away, notwithstanding the pitch to which the king's expectations had been raised, the loveliness of the maiden burst upon his sight like a vision of glory. Although power unlimited, stirred by licentiousness most capricious, had brought to him the fairest of all Cambodia's daughters, never before had he beheld a woman such as this. He was filled with wonder and delight, while she stood before him for a moment terrified and uncertain. The loose and flowing garments she wore, such was the fineness of their texture, hung about her in delicate folds, veiling but not concealing the grace and elegance of contour peculiar to budding womanhood, and which she possessed to a superlative degree. The faultless feet were bare, and with the marvelous ankles had naught to conceal their charms.

The excitement of the occasion, after the first pal-

lor had passed away, illumined the eyes with a light more splendid than that of brilliants, and brought the warm blood to the surface, so that even the darker tinge of Cambodia could not hide the crimson ; and a bright flush lit up and enriched the gold of her complexion. The features, delicately cut and refined, quivered with emotion like rippling rice-fields agitated by the breeze. It was not for many moments that she stood thus blushing and confused. The sad experiences of the near past had added to maturity of the body that of mind, so that now she was, in every respect, a woman fully developed. She was quick to think, and had inherited of the courage and determination of her father. She had satisfied herself that resistance was useless, and concluded to meet the issue with resolution. Under the influence of this resolve, she cast hesitation aside and moved toward the throne. As she did so her head was erect and firm, her figure queenly, while her step was sedate and slow, dignified and most graceful. Every movement disclosed a new loveliness, like the unfolding of a glorious panorama. As she advanced, Norodom seemed dazed, so wrapped was he in the contemplation of her beauty. He felt, at the same time, stealing over him a sensation new and strange. It was a drawing of the spirit powerfully toward this woman, without the presence of the beastly impulses which moved him toward the hundreds of others who had been her unfortunate predecessors.

Anirah continued to move forward until she had reached almost to the foot of the throne, while the king still sat immovable, his eyes fixed upon the superb creature as she approached. Reaching nearly to the lowest step, for the first time she remembered what, in her ex-

citement, had been forgotten—that in the presence of her sovereign she, a subject, should be prostrate. Terrified by a sudden consciousness of the omission, she cast herself at once upon the floor. Now, the spell which appeared to rest upon Norodom was broken, and he arose hastily to prevent the act of obeisance. Too late to accomplish this, he raised her gently to her feet.

“Arise, fair maiden,” he exclaimed; “it is not meet that thou shouldst be thus humbled. Rather art thou fitted, as its queen, to receive the homage of the world.”

With these words he led her up, sharing with her the seat of state and honor—a grace which, during all his reign, had never before been accorded to a single human being. In a while so brief Anirah had become complete mistress of his callous heart, and infused into it, for the first time during all his vicious career, a sentiment not cruel and debased.

CHAPTER XXI.

CONDEMNATION OF MAHAGUA.

NORODOM, although in disposition utterly depraved, in person was handsome and stately. His features gave little evidence of the vicious passions and base instincts that so long had ruled his heart. On the contrary, they seemed open and engaging rather than sinister and repellent.

By prevailing opinion, however, among those who had never seen him, as is usual in such cases, he was supposed to be in appearance repulsive, with hideous

features and form distorted. The impression justly entertained regarding his moral nature had been permitted to mold the general conception of his external semblance.

Before coming into his presence, Anirah had shared the prevalent idea ; and she had also expected, at his hands, a treatment anything but considerate and respectful. It was a cause of wonderment, therefore, when, instead of the ill-favored countenance and misshapen figure anticipated, she beheld a man vigorous and robust, handsome and comely. Great was her astonishment as well when she received tenderness and deference where she had looked for rudeness and brutality.

The consequence of this surprise was a powerful reaction, and it so happened that, despite the nature of the feelings with which she had approached him, and her knowledge of his wickedness, Norodom, from the first, produced upon the maiden a strong impression. Remembering, however, the death of her beloved father and the other calamities brought upon her by the agency of the king, she was determined that the sanctuary of her heart, to him, should be for ever closed. Nevertheless, he seemed determined to win her regard as well as to possess her person, and so, pursued her with tender and considerate wooing. In this instance, as in so many others where the affection of woman is concerned, when love had once begun the conquest, resistance was in vain ; and his triumph proved speedy and complete. It was, therefore, not long before Anirah, unable to offer further resistance, surrendered to the royal suitor, and reciprocated his earnest attachment.

Upon the part of Norodom, the conquest by our he-

roine, from the first, was absolute and complete. He found Anirah, in manners and disposition, as amiable as, in form and feature, she was lovely. He took her at once into unlimited favor, and, so soon as her devotion toward himself was aroused, raised her to the dignity of wifehood, and she became, in consequence, the Queen of Cambodia.

The announcement of an event so much at variance with the previous history of their sovereign astounded the people. Still greater was their surprise when the royal mandate went forth decreeing a national jubilee in honor of the occasion, and that valuable largess be distributed among them. From the accumulated hoards of the treasury great sums were spent in public display, intended to be expressive of general delight. In view of her recent bereavement, Anirah at first objected to festivities on her account, and was anxious for their postponement. Norodom and his Council of State, after solemn deliberation, determined that, in the acquisition of such a queen, the monarch and his subjects had experienced a cause of joy overwhelming in its nature, and such as was not to be restrained, or denied due and immediate recognition. The dead would be honored; but the nation and its sovereign should be allowed to rejoice and celebrate their good fortune. Anirah, then, with that perfect submission which detracts not from the pleasure it accords, even by a suggestion of opposition, graciously gave consent, and even, banishing the shadows from her brow, participated with her lord in the public ceremonials.

So unusual, during this hitherto oppressive reign, had been occasions of gladness, whether public or private, that the people had become, in disposition and

appearance, morose and gloomy. Now, however, they welcomed this new departure as the harbinger of better days, and the old joyousness of manner and nature returned suddenly upon them. They entered with ardor into the festivities. Each city and town, as the proclamation reached it, was, for a considerable time, illuminated every night by countless lanterns of every shape and hue. The priests and people formed great processions in the streets, and fire-works of unprecedented brilliancy and beauty delighted the populace. Labor was suspended throughout the land, and all surrendered themselves to dancing and feasting.

Once in that confidence which is begotten of affection, mutual and confessed, Anirah was speaking of her life at Atonga; while Norodom, pleased to learn all connected with the woman he loved, listened with interest. She was recounting her experience with early suitors, and mentioned, among others, the name of Mahagua. Remembering him, the king became additionally curious and attentive, eliciting from Anirah all particulars connected with this incident of her history. When these were given, he was able to fathom the villain's motive in bearing the intelligence which had resulted in the mission of Myamma to Atonga. Then, in turn, Norodom recited the story of Mahagua's treachery.

Coming thus, for the first time, to a knowledge of this wickedness, there swept over the heart of Anirah bitter recollections of its sad consequences; the death of her father and the torture of her brother. For an instant she was filled with resentment toward the traitor, and, upon the spur of the moment, gave hasty and unguarded expression to her feelings. The pressure of

other matters had driven Mahagua from the monarch's recollection, and he was still in confinement.

Norodom, himself incensed, and stirred by Anirah's words, resolved that the wretch should die. Accordingly, on parting with his queen, the sovereign issued his decree for the execution of the prisoner.

CHAPTER XXII.

SCOURGING OF MAHAGUA.

SUCH was the infatuation of the monarch that he was seldom out of the company of her whose charms had cast their spell about him. It was, therefore, not many hours after the issuance of this fatal order until the pair were again together. Thinking to gratify her, he told Anirah of what had just been done. The tender heart and merciful disposition of the father had descended upon the daughter, and she was inexpressibly shocked by the idea that, upon her account, a human being should perish. The thought was also painful that, for a moment, Norodom could suspect her of deriving pleasure, or satisfaction, from the sacrifice of life. Earnestly she pleaded for mercy on behalf of the doomed man, begging that he be spared, and even released from prison. She took occasion also to make known to the king, in a manner that was gentle as possible, but firm, that to her the shedding of blood was intolerably odious. The king had been born with sanguinary instincts; and, through long years of indulgence, this innate ferocity had assumed the character of controlling passion. The

condemnation of men had always been to him the occasion of sensations bordering upon savage joy ; and, as a matter of pleasure, he had attended often the public executions, which had been, during his reign, so very numerous.

For these reasons, the request preferred by Anirah ran counter to every impulse of his nature. He argued in the hope of dissuading her from continuing the prayer, dwelling upon the villainy and treachery of the condemned. All, however, was to no purpose, for she remained steadfast and persistent. Satisfied at last that further attempts at dissuasion were useless, Norodom lapsed for some moments into silence. Within him a conflict was in progress. Love, the new-comer, was waging war against the yearning for blood, which so long had ruled his heart with undisputed sway. Anirah watched him closely, observing the changings of his countenance, not fully conscious of the truth, but yet aware, as though by intuition, that there was cause for anxiety. Perceiving his continued agitation, she went nearer to him, and, casting her arms about his neck, kissed him lovingly. A caress so opportune and tender could not fail of deciding the issue, had it been more evenly balanced than it was. Love was conqueror, and for the first time in the history of this monarch, since the casting aside of the veil of dissimulation, originally assumed, mercy was exercised.

Not an instant too soon had clemency been evoked in favor of Mahagua. Already, when the decree of pardon reached the public prison, had its gates been thrown open that the doomed man might be led to execution. He was fully prepared to meet his fate with courage ; but yet this rescue, so unexpected, was at the moment a source of infinite relief.

Although the villain was to be spared from death, and his freedom had been promised, the king had not agreed that he was to escape all punishment. Accordingly, by royal command, he was led back to prison, and, in its yard, subjected to severe castigation. When he perceived what was in store, Mahagua was struck with dismay, and bitterly regretted the granting of his life. He struggled violently with the men as they bound him. Nevertheless, notwithstanding his resistance, he was forced into a sitting posture, with his hands and feet firmly tied to a stout rod that was held to earth at either end by a lusty fellow on all-fours. Thus was the back constrained into an arched position, while a powerful varlet applied a swinging rod with all his force.

The men who thus carried out the sovereign's mandate were themselves convicts, bearing each upon his cheek the degrading brand of crime. They were members of the corps of pardoned criminals forming the constabulary of the realm.

The instrument of punishment was of bamboo, long and heavy, yet lithe and elastic. As the executioner laid it on, his own strong muscles stood out like whipcords, and with every blow the hissing stem cut into the flesh, and the blood followed in copious streams, gathering in pools upon the ground.

The terrible flagellation proceeded with vigor, until the designated number of strokes had been delivered. Then the victim was released and permitted to depart. During all this suffering the man of iron nerve had uttered neither cry nor groan; nor had his bleeding form flinched from the keen blows as they descended. He went forth doggedly silent, speaking no word, and

giving, in no manner, expression to his feelings. He was, nevertheless, consumed with burning rage.

As he was about to avail himself of his freedom, he was informed of the agency through which had come the sparing of his life ; but even to this announcement he condescended no reply. Instead, however, of awakening within him sentiments of gratitude toward Anirah, it but intensified his hatred.

Worse than death, in his estimation, was the indignity to which he had been subjected ; and he attributed its infliction entirely to the daughter of Alompra. Far better had it been for Cambodia's queen if the original intention of Norodom had been concealed from her, and Mahagua and his hate been buried in a single grave.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE FUNERAL HILL.

As Myamma had taken the precaution of bringing to the capital the body of Alompra, the king was called upon to determine the manner of its disposal. Such was the force of the infatuation now upon him that Norodom lost no opportunity of pleasing and showing respect to her who had conquered his love. As a mark of homage to the daughter of the dead, the monarch decreed to the remains obsequies royal in their character. This was at variance with the usages of the realm, for by custom immemorial such honors had been confined to sovereigns alone, or such as were to them allied by closest ties of blood.

Just beyond the city walls, rising abruptly from the bank, was an elevation that formed a point in the course of the river, and, like a promontory, juttred out into its waters. Where it faced the stream its flanks, to some height, were steep and rugged ; but the approach from land was gradual, and the summit was broad, and rounded symmetrically as the side of an ellipse.

This was the hill reserved exclusively for the funeral ceremonies of royalty ; and, except upon occasions when these solemn rites were performing, access to its sacred top was forbidden to the populace. Nothing in the shape of buildings usually marred the perfection of its contour, and within its hallowed soil no tree or shrub permanently sank its roots.

Now, however, under the inspiration of the king's command, there arose upon this crest, as though by magic, an imposing edifice, constructed with all the taste and beauty belonging so notably to Cambodian architecture. From the shores of the Great Lake of Thalé-Sap, mighty trees, of resinous nature and in full foliage, had been transplanted, forming upon the slope and about the crown of the hill a magnificent grove, whose spreading boughs afforded grateful shade, while their leaves rustled musically to the passing breeze.

At various spots within this transient plantation, and under its protecting branches, were built a number of pavilions of wood, graceful in appearance, although in construction not substantial. These were intended for the comfort of the priests, and of the people who should participate in the funereal solemnities.

Above the verdant tops, and through the avenues dividing them, glistened the white walls of the central structure, rising to support a serrated roof, which last

was broken by imposing domes mounting one above the other, in apparent confusion, but of striking grandeur. These were themselves pointed by tall and slender spires, duly proportioned, delicate and shapely, their tapering outlines contrasting effectively with the swelling roundness of the cupolas. Domes and spires were ornamented elaborately with glaze and gilding, and, as the sun flooded them with light, they shone resplendent, like burnished gold and polished silver.

High up, within these lofty pinnacles, swayed sweet-toned bells, so delicately hung that they responded to the slightest zephyr, and flooded the country with melodious chimings.

At a moderate distance the fabric rivaled in appearance the grandest temples of the city, but a nearer approach and closer inspection revealed the fact that there was about it little of the real and nothing that was substantial. The walls, seeming of stucco, were of canvas, upon a frame-work of wood, and covered with paper, painted in deceptive imitation of more solid material. To each spire ropes were attached, slender but strong, reaching to the ground, and secured by firm fastenings at either end, resembling stays to the masts of a ship. Indeed, without such precaution, the frail peaks would have tottered and fallen, accomplishing, no doubt, at the same time, the ruin of the entire erection.

While upon the funeral hill these preparations were in progress, within one of the temples of the city the remains of Alompra were reposing in state. Around them, by day and by night, some of the principal grandees of the realm kept guard, swinging, at the same time, golden censers, in which was burning the fragrant dust of agila-wood.

Meanwhile five imposing cars were being built, indicating by their number and magnificence that the highest honors were to be paid to the deceased. These were of bamboo and sandal-wood, all of different shapes and pleasing patterns, and built so tall that they towered far above the great wheels on which they were supported. The principal one of the number stood in altitude at least fifty feet above the ground. From the front and rear two projections extended, long, tapering, and curving slightly upward, like the prow and stern of a war-canoe, each richly carved and embellished. Midway between these elongated ends the carriage ascended, in the shape of a broad turret, or elevated stage, with solid base, and cornices, and central moldings, each side painted in glowing colors and fantastic figures. Its faces were also decked with small mirrors, set in ; and these, when bathed in sunlight, returned the radiance with dazzling effect. The upper square was encompassed by a railing of sandal-wood, in bars running crosswise and highly polished, ornamented but not covered with gilding. Within the space so inclosed, rising at short distance from the margin, so as to leave a surrounding balcony, firm posts of precious wood went up, pointing outward in such manner as to support a wider canopy or roof above. Without the railing, and from the very brink of the platform, were fixed tall and slender poles, encased in velvet of brightest red, and displaying at their points fluttering banderoles, or tiny umbrellas, glittering with spangles. The floor was covered with rich carpet, and the overhanging ceiling upholstered with crimson silk and skirted by an exterior curtain of the same, one cubit wide. Above this hanging drapery was a cornice, heavy and beautified, and its lower edge

was trimmed with pendant bits of isinglass, kept by the winds in perpetual and shimmering motion.

In the center of the space thus covered stood the frame, gilded so as to seem of burnished metal, upon which was to repose the coffin of Alompra. Still higher than all, the crowning superstructure rested, reared of split bamboo, light but strong, and in the shape of a quadrangular pyramid. It was broken by terraces and balconies, and pointed by a tapering spire, and was all encased in foil of gold. The other cars, although of inferior altitude, were no less elaborate than this, and no less profusely decorated.

The king, from the outset, was determined that these obsequies should be made an affair of state of the highest importance. He had therefore issued his proclamation, summoning to the capital, for the purpose of participating, all the princes and tributary rajahs, the governors of provinces, and nobles of the land, each of these being expected, according to custom, to bring valuable gifts, as a contribution toward defraying the vast expense of the ceremonies.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE FUNERAL PROCESSION.

AFTER a lapse of considerable time the elaborate preparations were completed, and the greater number of the rajahs and grandees of Cambodia and its dependencies had arrived. With each was a retinue proportionate to the rank and wealth of the master. In addi-

tion, thousands had been drawn by curiosity from the surrounding country to witness the obsequies. The capital was likewise filled with strangers of every race and nationality, exhibiting a variety of costumes. Bands of actors and musicians, troops of female dancers and rope-walkers, tumblers, jugglers, and serpent-charmers, had also been attracted from every quarter, by the hope of vast crowds and appreciative audiences. These were performing in all parts of the city, and beyond its walls, in the direction of the sacred hill. By order of the king, the houses on either side of the route to be taken by the procession were decorated, each according to the means of its occupants. Many of the wealthier inhabitants spent large sums in ornamentation. Some had spread over the road or street, in front of their premises, expensive cloths of heavy velvet, crimson or yellow, while others extended overhead great awnings of the same rich material.

When the appointed hour had arrived, the long and imposing cortege was formed, and moved toward and through the Gate of Funerals, beyond the ramparts. The advance was held by a thousand standard-bearers, dressed in red brocaded cloth, bearing banners of every conceivable shape, all of rich silk, heavy with gold embroidery, and disclosing the colors of the rainbow, in almost infinite variety of shades. Each of these standards was blazoned with some curious device of dragon, griffin, or flying-serpent. To the front and rear of this detachment were bands of innumerable musicians, plying their instruments with indefatigable zeal, and filling the air with loud harmony.

Next in order came a number of cars bearing living beasts and birds, and the embalmed carcasses of monster

fish, taken from the rivers and surrounding seas, and great, wide-spreading trees ; all intended to bespeak the participation, even of the animal and vegetable kingdoms, in the general sorrow. The floats bearing these creatures were drawn, as were the majority of the other vehicles which followed, by soldiers, attired in bright and varied costumes.

The third division consisted of figures of winged elephants, horses, buffaloes, lions, tigers, and leopards ; curiously shaped cocks and birds, griffins, dragons, and serpents, represented in every conceivable attitude. Some bore upon their backs miniature towers or pagodas. To none was given entirely its proper shape, but each was marked with some exaggeration, or invested with characteristics drawn from the imagination, or else belonging to other genera. Thus, elephants and cocks exchanged heads, or birds possessed the limbs of animals, or of human beings, or of griffins, while beasts, fully feathered, were decorated with wings, or with the barbed and forked tail of the dragon, or terminated in the long and coiling folds of the serpent. All these nondescripts were richly ornamented, some being covered with gold or silver foil, and others spotted or striped, and painted in bright and pleasing colors, but in utter disregard of analogy to nature.

Now, one thousand men, upholding umbrellas of every shape and size, rich in the texture of their cloth and elegant in appearance, paced slowly along. These numerous sun-shades were indicative of the eminent worth of the dead man, and of the exalted position to which his merits had entitled him in succeeding states of being.

Ten hundred more, accompanied by music, followed,

dressed in flowing robes of white, and wearing crowns of the same color, each bearing in his hand a flower-leaf of the sacred lotus. These were representatives of the celestial messengers who were to meet the soul of the departed Alompra, and usher it, with appropriate honors, into the highest heavens.

Preceded by bands of trumpeters, and drawn by three dozen horses, each led by a slave of the temple, next came the chief priest of Cambodia. He sat upon a high throne, canopied above, and forming the apex of a pyramidal car, carved and gilded, and beset with tiny bits of glass of various colors. He was robed in yellow, and, in loud and solemn tones, as he was borne along, recited the holy prayers.

Following, each in a vehicle decked out with fans and umbrellas—the emblems of royalty—its beauty and expensiveness being proportionate to the rank of the occupant, were the nearest princes of the blood. These were attired in costly paraphernalia, with golden chains about them, as additional marks of their lineage and importance.

More elaborate and sumptuous than its predecessors, now came the royal carriage itself, upon which were Norodom and Anirah, side by side, blazing with jewels. Together they held a silken scarf, long and silvery, and reaching back to the coffin of the deceased, to which its other end was attached.

The five great funeral cars were next in order; the first with the remains of the dead, and those following bearing heaps of yellow cloth, such as worn by priests, and venerated for that cause, or quantities of agila and other fragrant wood, to aid in the incineration of the corpse, or baskets of fruit and other articles of food,

their essence for the use of the departed spirit, but the grosser substance, with numerous other gifts, for the inmates of the nearest monastery.

A thousand men, in guise of angels, succeeded, with beating gongs, and one hundred towering spires, composed each of twenty umbrellas, one above the other, about a common stem, large and wide-spreading at the base, and diminishing gradually toward the top. Each umbrella was of gold cloth, with tassels red and green and purple. After, came another throng, attired in red, and beating huge and gilded tom-toms, or bearing artificial flowers of yellow cloth. Nondescripts innumerable, somewhat like the effigies farther in advance, but more grotesque, next formed the line, and were themselves followed by ten hundred bearers of long and flowing pennants of embroidered silk.

Now appeared the remaining princes of the blood, and the high potentates of the kingdom and its dependencies, and important nobles of the realm, each with a personal retinue, clad in the costume of his race or section. These dignitaries were, some on horseback, others upon elephants. In either case, the animals that bore them were magnificently caparisoned, and led by slaves, richly dressed. Some were drawn in vehicles of various kinds, or borne in palanquins, upon the shoulders of servants.

Closing this magnificent pageant came vast numbers of the populace, in holiday attire. Some wore handsome and costly garments, while others had nothing but the waist-cloth common to the poor.

Along the route great crowds of curious people thronged, prostrating themselves humbly, and touching foreheads to earth, in token of submission, whenever

there passed a grandee, or superior of any rank. During the progress alms were distributed with lavish hand, innumerable rockets were sent up, and bombs and other fire-works filled the air with fiery meteors and great clouds of sulphurous smoke.

CHAPTER XXV.

BURNING OF THE DEAD.

THUS, with pomp and magnificent circumstance, the remains of Alompra were conducted to the summit of the Royal Hill of Funerals, and brought within the frail but imposing structure erected there. The coffin was placed upon a catafalque, fancifully constructed and elaborately ornamented. At its foot sat Anirah and the nearest female relatives of the king, wailing loudly.

Now, from a near pavilion came the priests, entering the temple of death. Immediately upon their appearance the women hushed their lamentations and the religious ceremonies began. Coming forward, the high priest and his chief assistant, together with Anirah, as closest of kin to the departed, took into their hands the long and silvery scarf attached to the case that held the dead. They sat down, still retaining the sash, the king and high dignitaries sitting with them. Then, slowly, and in deep and solemn tones, the pontiff recited the creed of Buddha, and repeated the commandments, his priestly associates and the laity taking up each clause as he pronounced it.

“ We worship Boodh,” they said, pausing long between each sentence.

“ We worship his law.”

“ We worship his priests.”

“ Do not kill.”

“ Do not steal.”

“ Do not commit adultery.”

“ Do not lie.”

“ Do not drink wine, or use intoxicating drugs.”

Now ensued a solemn pause of greater length, after which the high priest rose and advanced slowly toward the corpse, summoning Anirah to follow his example. Then he bade her, from a shell of cocoa-nut, pour some water upon the scarf until it was saturated, and the liquid fell upon the ground. As this was done the pontiff again raised his deep-toned voice, and was accompanied by Anirah in gentler accents.

“ Let the deceased,” they said, “ partake of the merit of the ceremonies now performing.”

“ Let him partake,” rejoined the auditors.

“ Let all present,” the two continued, “ partake of the merit of the ceremonies now performing.”

“ We partake,” the throng responded.

Other priests in turn succeeded their chief, repeating the formalities and prayers as he had done, or adding others, until, finally, the ecclesiarch, mounting by convenient steps, stood upon the catafalque, at the head of the coffin. Extending his arms above the deceased, he pronounced, in a loud voice, the concluding invocations, and the religious ceremonies were at an end. Then the holy brethren withdrew, taking with them the numerous and valuable presents which, in accordance with usage, had been provided.

Now began the more immediate preparations for the burning. The agila and other odoriferous woods that had been borne in one of the funeral cars were heaped beneath and about the platform upon which the remains were lying. The temple of death, despite the inflammable character of its materials, was rendered more combustible by abundant applications of oil and liquid resins. The corpse itself was dressed with fragrant ointments, and odorous gums were heaped about it—all with the double purpose of filling the space around with sweet perfumes, and to secure the complete incineration of the body.

Upon the breast of the corpse was a silver chafer, flat and wide, brimmed with fluid balm of ready ignition. Herein, by the hand of the daughter, as nearest of blood to the departed, the flame was to be first applied. In the corners of the gloomy apartment, upon the ground, lay larger vessels of bronze, likewise supplied with balsam. A chandala, or burner of the dead, stood with lighted torch beside each bowl, ready to touch it to the resinous sap within the moment the fire shot up from the breast of the dead.

Now came the first solemn signal—the sounding, in slow and measured tollings, of a deep-toned bell. As it ceased its clangings, and the vibration of its heavy lips yet thrilled the air, all excepting Anirah and the burners of the dead retired from the temple.

Again the sonorous peal was heard, and, with streaming eyes and averted face, the daughter brought the blazing wand she held in contact with the fluid in the dish of silver. For a few brief seconds no responsive gleam appeared. Then a slight spark, like a blue star, rested for an instant upon the bosom of the liquid, and,

rapidly enlarging, the flame shot forth, leaping high, with fierce and sudden energy, and seeming, in its eagerness, to lap up the seething balsam upon which it fed.

Anirah, perceiving that the last sad office of filial piety had been accomplished, turned reluctantly toward the door. As she did so, those remaining thrust their torches into the bowls of bronze, and the infuriate fire sprang up like glowing serpents, writhing and coiling almost to the ceiling itself, and wrapping with fervent folds each post and pillar upholding the structure. Then the burners of the dead withdrew precipitately, and in a few moments the interior of the temple was one mass of furious combustion. As this reached the outer walls and steep roof, the dry wood and painted canvas of which they were composed warped and shriveled, and then were seized in its consuming grasp, until the whole of the now swaying fabric was enveloped in grandest conflagration. Over each imposing dome and pointed gable the flame coursed swiftly, and up the tall pinnacles and slender spires, bringing them down blazing into the igneous mass.

Above all, in low and heavy clouds, the black smoke hung, lit up by the red glare of the struggling element, high-leaping, as though in the successive onslaught and repulse of some mighty conflict between the spirits of light and darkness. The calidity was so intense that the trees, transplanted from the shores of the Great Lake, and forming the groves about the Temple of Death, gave forth their resinous saps, and in turn ignited, adding to the already mighty volume of fire.

Thus, for many hours was the summit of the Hill of Funerals clad in flaming garments. At last, when all

that would burn was swept away, the conflagration slackened, then smoldered and died. So fierce, however, had been the heat that the very roots beneath the surface were consumed ; and the soil itself, to the depth of a foot or more under and about the edifice, was reduced to blackened dust and ashes.

When all was completely extinguished, strict search was made for unburned fragments of the dead, and a few charred bones rewarded the investigation. These were reverently surrendered to the priests, by whose pious hands they were cleansed and shaped into holy images of Buddha, to be perpetually preserved as relics most precious.

CHAPTER XXVI.

KONESSET FOLLOWS HIS FAMILY.

WE left Konesset at Atonga, suffering so grievously from his injuries as to be unable to accompany his father and sister when they were compelled to depart with Myamma and the soldiers. He was resolved, however, to follow, so soon as his condition permitted.

His strong constitution finally asserted itself : his wounds healed, and his strength was entirely restored. Then he prepared for the long and perilous journey that lay before him. Cambodia has never been noted for the good condition or safety of its highways, and at the remote period of our story they were doubtless more wretched and insecure than they are at the present date. The route to the capital was across many chains of rugged mountains and stretches of morass, and numerous

streams traversed it, most of which were bridgeless, and many exceedingly dangerous in the passage. The riotous and demoralizing reign of Norodom had relaxed even the inefficient Oriental discipline before prevailing. The kingdom, therefore, now more than ever, swarmed with robbers, and its waters with pirates ; all of the most desperate character. To such a pass had matters come in this respect that travel was suspended except in large parties, as armed caravans. These were usually composed of traders, whose interests compelled them to journey and transport their merchandise, and who, with guards and servants, were almost the only itinerants in the land. By confederation they were able to move in great bodies, with strong escort ; and even these precautions did not always insure them against attack. Attempted surprises, occasionally successful, were not infrequent, and even open assaults in full force, some resulting in victory for the outlaws.

The departure of these companies was periodical, usually fixed with reference to season and the state of the roads. It would now be months before the next would be organized and ready to proceed, and Konesset, if he waited, would be compelled to endure a protracted delay. To undertake the journey with insufficient force would be to invite aggression which could not be resisted. The only course remaining was to attempt the passage alone, hoping by stealth and caution to elude the perils of the way.

His friends endeavored strenuously to persuade him to postpone his starting until it could be made with the prospect of safety. Konesset, however, though realizing the danger of the undertaking, felt that the fate of those he loved would be a matter of speedy determina-

tion; and he feared that by tarrying he would be unable to reach them in time to assist, if occasion presented, or at all events to share their lot. He was unequal to the task of sustaining a long suspense, aggravated by consciousness of the fact that his father and sister were in suffering or peril, while he, so far away, was inactive. Therefore, he resolved to go at once.

Among those who had constituted the household of Alompra was Ragoba, an aged and venerable dependent, a native of India. By occupation originally a juggler, acrobat, and serpent-charmer, he had been a wanderer even beyond the habit of his nomadic class, visiting many of the states and principalities of Hindostan, and straying through various sections of what is now known as Farther India, then the kingdom of Cambodia. During the progress of his roving he had strolled even to the remote place where stood Atonga, in which city he was stricken with dangerous and protracted illness.

The Buddhist considers every misfortune as the consequence of previous demerit, the penalty whereof is inevitable. If avoided in one shape, it must be endured in another. He sees, therefore, no necessity or advantage to the sufferer in alleviating the present misery of others, and so he does little to assist strangers in trouble or distress.

It has been said that Christianity is the worship of sorrow, and it is likely to impress one that, despite its theories and pretenses, practical Buddhism is truly selfishness raised to the dignity of a religion. It teaches men striving for the highest merit to deny their better natures. To such it inculcates the extirpation of all desire, and the sundering of every tie, whether virtuous or meretricious, as only through the attainment of utter

indifference can its culminating reward, annihilation, be secured. Even its priesthood is organized upon this principle egoism. Men are impelled to seek it, not as with the ministry of Christianity, for the honor of a Supreme Being, and with a view to serving the spiritual wants of others, but solely for the purpose of furthering individual interest, by expediting themselves upon what is considered the upward path.

Indeed, what is usually denominated the priesthood of Buddhism has in it little that is truly sacerdotal. It partakes more of the nature of monachism. The monk of Christendom, however, seeks by his austerities to glorify as well as to propitiate his Maker, and directs his prayers and expiations to the Throne of Grace for the sanctification of the whole world, as well as for his own moral and religious advancement. The Buddhist, on the other hand, in the performance of his works of merit, thinks of himself alone, leaving to his fellows the task of accomplishing for themselves their own destinies.

Indeed, it has been asserted by a close and enlightened observer of the manners of an Eastern people that, were it not for the fact that the Almighty had providentially implanted the virtues of love and true charity too deeply in the human heart even for its eradication, Buddhism would, centuries ago, have destroyed them entirely among the races whose fortunes it controls.

Alompra was blessed with a fund of humanity so superabundant that even the cold dogmas and practices of his creed and people could not prevail against it. In this instance he pitied the friendless stranger, and concerned himself in his wretchedness. He had him at once conveyed to his own home, and eventually restored

him to health and strength. The Indian, on his side, likewise rose superior to the same influences, and, feeling grateful, ever loved those who had extended these favors to him. The result was that the juggler ceased his wanderings, and, settling in Atonga, attached himself permanently to the household of his benefactor, proving an invaluable servant.

This man, who felt toward the family and was considered by it more as a friend than a servitor, had approved the resolution of Konesset, and, finding it fixed, gave valuable advice.

“If thou goest to the capital,” he said, “keep thine identity concealed, as by this means alone thou mayest hope to be of service to those in whose safety thou art concerned. The beauty of the young mistress will doubtless impress the king, and for a period stand as a shield for herself and the master. To a nature, however, debased and wicked as that of the monarch, stability is impossible. In time he will tire even of her, as he has done of so many before. Then will the danger be present, and then assistance needed. If, in the mean time, thou art disclosed, it will not lie in thy power to avert calamity. Thou mayest, in proper disguise, secure employment in the palace, where thou wouldst be able to watch the coming peril, and possibly aid the timely escape of thy father and sister.”

“I thank thee,” replied Konesset, “for these suggestions of wisdom, and they shall be observed with care. Canst thou not further advise mine ignorance? Tell me, in what semblance should I appear at the capital, and how am I to secure a residence within the palace?”

“Remember,” responded the other, “the great

strength that Nature has given thee. Under my tuition thou hast been an apt scholar in all whereof I was master, and art well qualified to appear in the rôle I filled so long. The skill thou dost possess will justify thee in expecting ready admission into the corps of jugglers and acrobats that provide amusement for the king, and, certainly, the influence of thy sister, while her power endures, will remove all difficulties. Thou hast acquired the language of my native province, and mayest easily assume the disguise of an Indian."

"But," again the young man asked, "how am I, without discovery, to commend myself to the patronage of Anirah?"

"I had a brother," was the answer, "but whether he be living or dead I know not. When last I was beneath my father's roof he was teaching the boy—though as yet little more than an infant—the rudiments of our calling. Doubtless, if surviving, the pupil has since become an adept. At all events, him thou mayest personate, and make, in my name, thine appeal to the mistress."

To Konesset these suggestions seemed, in every respect, sensible as the first, and he rejoiced at finding a counselor so wise. He resolved faithfully to follow the salutary advice.

CHAPTER XXVII.

COMING OF THE MONSOON.

No one was taken into Konesset's confidence beyond this aged servitor, and he knew that upon him implicit

reliance could be placed. An outfit, suitable to the character to be assumed, was readily secured. He deemed it prudent, however, to delay its use until he was nearly arrived at his destination. The costume was light and not encumbering, and so he was in condition to travel with expedition and secrecy. The first stages of the journey were easily accomplished. The period consumed in healing his wounds had been considerable, and now the rainy season was almost at hand. He hoped, however, by expedition to pass the dangerous places before it would actually set in. Once beyond the rivers and morasses, and into the mountains, stormy weather would be an ally instead of an enemy, serving to confine the robbers to their dens.

The first difficulty apprehended was from the great swamps that lay some distance from Atonga. These were scarcely reached before it was apparent that the monsoon, with its aqueous freight, was drawing near, unfortunately in advance of its accustomed time. The earth was cracked and parched by long drought, during which the fierce solar gaze had not been obscured by a single cloud. The trees were drooping and dejected, with sere leaves hanging upon sapless branches. Vegetation in general was arid and shriveled, and about to perish. All seemed pleading piteously for water.

Over the face of Nature the atmosphere became more close and sultry, and the sun shone with gloomy light. Dark and spreading vapors appeared upon the horizon, in accumulating masses, piling upward toward the zenith. Low thunders reverberated in the distance, and the somber clouds were lit by occasional flashes.

Then over the tops of the forest trees, in the far distance, like the tramp of charging armies, was heard the

mighty rush of coming winds. Soon came the blast itself, with powerful sweep, bearing upon its front a host of flying leaves and broken twigs, with beating torrents and lightning in blinding sheets, and deafening thunders. Chaos and confusion seemed at hand. The heat and closeness, rendering the air oppressive, in a moment was brushed away, and, as though for the kindly purpose of strengthening Nature to withstand the fury of the elements, the temperature became cool and invigorating.

After the first tremendous outburst there was a lull, and all creation was refreshed and rejoicing. The earth gave forth its fragrance, and the atmosphere was laden with grateful odors from resinous trees and aromatic shrubs. The birds of the woods flitted joyfully among the branches, singing and twittering, while, with glad clamor, those of the water took flight for well-stocked lakes and ponds farther in the interior. Millions of insects filled the fields and forests with their chirpings, and frogs without number added discordant voices to the mighty chorus.

Thus matters stood until the night. Creation itself appeared in grandest jubilee over the coming of the rain, which, as darkness fell, began its descent in continuous floods. Konesset alone did not share in the general rejoicing. He now found the difficulties of his way increasing with every step, until, even to his undaunted spirit, they seemed almost beyond surmounting. All Nature was against him, yet he plodded on with unshaken resolution. The down-pouring waters obliterated the road, made torrents of insignificant streams, and filled to overflowing each treacherous morass. The vivid lightnings rent the skies, striking down

the tallest trees with dreadful uproar, endangering life by the falling of riven trunks and shattered branches.

Ordinary men would have recoiled from such threatening perils, and delayed the further prosecution of the journey until the elements were at rest, and the threatening tides subsided. Konesset, however, was of strong will, and he had unbounded confidence in his physical powers, and the purpose which led him was grave and pressing. He was, therefore, not to be deterred.

He avoided, so far as possible, each quagmire and swollen current; but, wherever it was essential, he pushed boldly forward, into and through them. On more than one occasion he was almost lost in the bog. The treacherous mud would give way beneath, and gather about him like black and noxious waters. It was only the struggles, long continued, of almost superhuman strength, that would relieve him from their foul embrace, and deliver him from suffocation in the slimy depths. The narrowness of these escapes, however, in no manner daunted his resolution, but, with courage and self-reliance firm as ever, he plunged into succeeding sloughs, deep and dangerous as their predecessors.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

PERILS BY FLOOD.

THERE were other perils besetting Konesset besides those arising from deceitful quagmires that surprised him, or stubborn bogs that barred his path. The great rivers were beyond their banks, and converted into

rushing torrents. So, likewise, what at other times would be a tiny streamlet, or a depression in the surface, now conducted a strong and dangerous current. These, when unavoidable, were encountered boldly. Across some he could climb or swing. Great trees occasionally mingled their branches overhead, serving as bridges. Vines and creepers would hang down from the tall tops above, or, in firm net-works, reach across. Others of these perilous waters were traversed on floating logs, or on natural bridges of fallen trunks. When all other means failed, he did not hesitate to cast himself into the currents, and battle manfully for the opposite bank.

On one occasion he was passing over a chain of lesser mountains that intersected his path. Already he had overcome the greater number of its difficulties, and was beyond the culminating ridge and in sight of the foothills at the farther edge. Now, however, he encountered a threatening river, which rushed along with furious sweep. It was, indeed, a hurricane of waters. Here no branch or vine could be of service; in the grasp no floating log would stay. Its broad surface the trunk of the tallest tree could never span.

Below the spot where Konesset stood it swerved suddenly to the right, extending one edge of its widened flow over a low, flat spit, that lay at the foot of the opposite slope. At ordinary stages this point was, doubtless, left uncovered; and its margin and surface were marked by low trees, with stout boles and spreading branches. Farther away the stream curved behind high rocks; and from the distance came a continuous roar, telling that the foaming tide there was plunging down a steep.

The outlook was appalling, but the torrent must be traversed. Konesset knew that his strength would be of little avail when he was immersed in the raging flood. He even doubted his ability at all to force himself across its headlong course ; and failure was certain death. He thought, however, that by starting high, and allowing ample room for drift, he might possibly reach the shoal beyond.

Accordingly, he walked along the bank, seeking a place most favorable for the plunge. Fortunately, he found a great trunk leaning far over, and affording promise of a partial gain. Picking his steps carefully to the farthest branch that would support him, he dived with all his might, and the impetus sent him some feet farther on his way. As he rose, the waters boiled and foamed about him, and he felt like one in the grasp of a powerful giant.

He was fairly hurled along, blinded and almost suffocated by the rough commotion. Nevertheless, he did not lose heart, but struggled with all his force for the opposite bank. The progress he made across, to him was scarcely noticeable. At every moment the noise of the cataract below grew louder and more dreadful, giving constant intimation of the fate awaiting, in case the swimmer missed the goal.

Such was the agitation of the current that his downward course seemed to him more rapid than it was. Hurried along, unable to see, and touching no bottom, with the din of the falls in front growing momentarily more appalling, he began to fear that he had missed the landing-place, and was on his way to destruction. Now the seconds lengthened almost to minutes, and hope was gone. Nevertheless, his exertions were con-

tinued, though in spirit he had abandoned himself to fate.

Suddenly across his face there swept the leaves of some low twig. Like magic, the touch infused new hope into his heart and fresh vigor into his limbs. Raising himself by a great effort, he grasped wildly at the branches. As he did so, a friendly bough was in his hand ; but the resistless sweep of the current tore it from his fingers, dashing and bruising him against roots and stumps—now beginning to be dangerous in his course. It seemed certain that he would be battered against these until life was extinct, and only a mangled corpse remained to take the plunge beyond.

He made one final effort to avert the doom, and, by good fortune, succeeded in clasping a pliant limb, which, yielding to the first fury of the tide, enabled him to secure and maintain his grip. By the assistance of this God-sent succor he upheld himself until his eyes were cleared, and the situation was surveyed.

He found that, instead of striking full upon the spit, as he had hoped to do, he had missed it almost entirely. The twig that had swept his face, and the branches at which he had successively clutched, were upon the very margin of this point ; and the bough to which he held was the last that could possibly have served him.

CHAPTER XXIX.

IN BAD HANDS.

At last Nature seemed conquered by the obstinacy of Konesset, and abandoned the contest. The light-

nings no longer flashed across the heavens, or plunged through the forest ; and the thunders retreated, grumbling, to the distance. The rain ceased its pouring, and the sun, bursting through the clouds, scattered them in heavy, angry masses. The atmosphere, purified by this war of elements, was fresh and balmy ; and the generous sunlight illumined all that before had been dark and gloomy. The tall and graceful palm-trees, invigorated and refreshed, shone, at their feathery summits, with verdure that was almost radiant ; and their swaying tops and rustling leaves, stirred by passing breezes, filled the air with soft and murmuring melody. Every bush and tree that stood upon the road-side, and every vine or creeper that ran and twined above, was bursting into bloom, or sending forth myriads of tender shoots, whose green was brighter and fresher than the older growth—all affording a thousand hues and shades, in pleasing harmony and striking contrast. It seemed, indeed, like the rising of the pendulum from the very nadir of gloom and depression to the apex of joy and exultation.

Beneath the feet of Konesset the waters ceased accumulating, and now ran off in currents less deep and perilous, finally uncovering the roads and interposing fewer difficulties. He was able to traverse the plains and morasses, and the minor mountains lying in his path, and to reach at last the foot-hills leading up to the greater chains beyond. These mighty ranges, whose peaks now towered sublime and in plain view, were the stronghold of the most desperate of all the robbers that scourged the afflicted kingdom of Cambodia. The most powerful of all the bands that sheltered themselves in these fastnesses was that of Kai Tau, a scoundrel born

in China, who had fled the land of his nativity to escape the penalty of crimes of unparalleled enormity. He had gathered about him, in considerable number, thieves and murderers of every race that inhabited the great peninsula now known as Farther India ; with others, Chinese, and natives of Hindostan.

From their lairs these brigands kept vigilant watch for unsuspecting caravans, and extended their forays by land and water through the country for miles around.

On the part of Konesset, the greatest caution was now required. Journeying by day was abandoned, and he groped his way, as best he could, in darkness. With the light, he sought a place of hiding, usually some cavern, and there rested until the sun was gone. Such sheltering recesses were not difficult to find, for the mountains abounded with them ; and they furnished secure and convenient harbors for the bandits that infested the region.

The traveler shared the jungles and forests through which he passed with roving beasts of prey, who contributed largely to the perils by which he was environed. Ferocious tigers and treacherous leopards, or ravening wolves in great packs, would gather about his places of concealment, or follow his footsteps ; and often he had to defend his life against their fierce attacks.

On one occasion he retired for the day into a cave, rolling against its mouth a bowlder that lay convenient. The night had been a fatiguing one, and he fell almost immediately into profound sleep. From this he was rudely wakened, to find the stone rolled away, and himself surrounded by a party of men, with weapons presented at his bosom. They were three in number, and

their villainous countenances justified the worst suspicions.

Konesset was a man of quick perception and prompt decision. He comprehended, at a glance, the futility of present resistance, and formed at once a plan of proceeding. Pretending overwhelming terror, he besought his captors not to return him to Atonga. To these appeals they deigned no immediate reply, but roughly bade him surrender his dagger. Then they commanded him to arise and proceed with them.

They did not turn in the direction of Atonga, but took their way toward the rugged heart of the mountains. Perceiving this, Konesset seemed delighted, and was loud in expressions of satisfaction. As the party went on, his spirits apparently rose higher at every moment, and he even ventured upon an occasional jest. As these were received with no disfavor, he began to hint slyly his supposition as to the character of his conductors, assuming to be greatly pleased at falling into such hands instead of into those of the Atongan authorities. His intimations meeting with no denial, he grew more confidential, declaring himself, at last, as a fugitive from justice, detected, while serving as one of its guards, in an attempt to rob the public chest. Finally all reserve was seemingly abandoned, and he announced the wish of associating himself with some of the free bands, expressing hope of its speedy gratification.

To his captors these tales seemed not unreasonable. It was unusual to find a solitary traveler in these perilous wilds. The motive that brought him must, therefore, have been urgent, and, to men of their habits, the cause assigned was most probable; and it served the prisoner, in their eyes, as a certificate of character.

The reserve of the robbers was giving way, and finally they were upon the best of terms with the captive. Their connection with the band of Kai Tau was acknowledged, and they declared that their new friend should be admitted to its fellowship. This promise of adoption into a brotherhood of crime was received with apparent rapture, and with expressions of thanks, loud and profuse.

CHAPTER XXX.

BATTLE WITH THE ROBBERS.

THE suspicions of the robbers were now at rest, and their watchfulness relaxed. The party had penetrated almost to the very core of the mountains. Everything was wild and rugged, and even dangerous to traverse. They descended steep declivities, passed through gorges, narrow and deeply cleft, up stubborn slopes, and along ledges almost as sharp and narrow as Al Sirat, the precarious bridge leading to the paradise of Mahomet. Konesset was impressed by the almost impregnable character of these fastnesses, considering how difficult would be the task of dislodging the robbers, by whom they were infested.

Another problem of nearer interest to himself likewise engaged his attention. His foes were three in number, and fully armed; and he was weaponless. The order of march was also a disadvantage: two behind and one in advance. This disposition would compel him to attack the pair that followed, with their com-

panion in rear ; or worse, to have the couple at his back while the one in front was assaulted.

The confidence of the brigands was essential to the success of any effort he might make at escape, and, fearing to destroy it, he abstained from suggestion or manœuvre calculated to effect the change. He was resolved, however, to postpone the attack so long as possible, hoping his enemies themselves might make the alteration.

This manner of journeying, originally a precaution, was now no longer a matter of design. It continued, however, until the prisoner began to be fearful of delay, and concluded, at all events, to deliver the onset at the next spot that favored.

Finally, fortune again befriended Konesset. One of those that had walked in the rear slipped hastily forward and engaged in confidential converse with him who had been always before. They entered now upon a part of the road particularly difficult and dangerous. The path skirted along the face of a precipice, upon a narrow, protruding ledge. Below was a mighty gulf, with a sheer descent of more than a thousand feet to the bed of a mountain stream. So narrow was the footing that those in advance could no longer remain abreast, and one fell back behind the other, in file. They both, however, continued to the front.

Here, the captive considered, was his opportunity. Springing suddenly upon the nearest of the robbers that was marching ahead, he pushed him violently from the rocky shelf. Startled by the despairing cry of his falling comrade, the other turned sharply, leveling his spear to receive the onslaught. The extraordinary physical power of Konesset was now of service. With a

grip of iron he seized the extended weapon just behind its head, and, delaying not to snatch it, he snapped the tough handle, and with the barbed fragment cast himself upon his enemy. In a second more the point was in the bandit's heart, and the body, still convulsed, was hurled over the side of the precipice. So powerful had been the thrust, that the lance-head was fixed firmly in the spine of the victim ; so that Konesset, with the hasty effort permitted, was unable to disengage it. He was, therefore, compelled to turn empty-handed upon the remaining brigand.

As the victor, bathed in the blood of him who had just been slain, confronted the survivor, his aspect was truly terrible. The eyes were alight with the fire of battle, the features set with deep-drawn lines of courage and determination, and the muscles strained and ready for the spring. All, indeed, was calculated to strike overpowering fear into a heart of stoutness.

In addition, the affrighted villain had witnessed a signal exhibition of the prowess of his assailant, and he had no spirit for a fight. He turned and fled incontinently, in his panic casting away his spear, which fell into the gulf. Konesset, in no wise bloodthirsty, under ordinary circumstances might have spared the flying wretch, although the latter doubtless deserved his fate. On this occasion, however, he felt assured that the robber, if permitted to escape, would alarm his fellows and bring the band upon the track, to scour the mountains until the prisoner was retaken and the death of their associates cruelly avenged.

The race was not a long one, for the pursuer was active and fleet of foot, and the fugitive soon heard the steps behind gaining rapidly upon him. In despair he

suddenly turned and cast himself upon his knees. This movement was so unexpected, and Konesset so close, that the latter was unable to check himself and stumbled headlong over the cringing figure, and was almost precipitated from the narrow ledge. He fell prostrate, but was up again in a moment, standing over his supplicating foe.

Piteous were the pleadings of the brigand, begging for life, and pledging himself by every oath, if spared, to abandon his career of crime. The face of Konesset softened for a moment, for he was touched by the misery of the man, and longed to spare him. Noticing this change of feature, the robber took heart, and his entreaties became more vehement. There was a struggle in the bosom of the victor, who naturally revolted against the slaying of an unresisting enemy, and one pleading for mercy. He was tempted to relent, thinking for a moment only of his own peril; but the fact that father and sister were involved as well forced itself upon him. For their sakes no unnecessary risk could be assumed. He determined, therefore, to end at once the painful scene, and so laid his hand upon the trembling bandit. The latter, again observing the alteration upon the countenance of his adversary, plucked sudden courage from despair, and sprang with violence upon Konesset. He hoped, by the surprise and fury of the assault, to cast its unguarded object into the gulf. He found, however, the form against which he threw himself planted firmly as a rock, and the attempt was unsuccessful. Then, in an agony of fear, he clung desperately to the brawny arms and shoulders of his executioner. He seemed to acquire from terror extraordinary strength, and his opponent found it difficult to cast him off without endangering himself.

After a few moments of struggle, during which the vigor of the conqueror was severely tried, the latter was able to press the robber against the side of the overhanging precipice. Then laying a palm suddenly upon the bandit's head, Konesset dashed it with irresistible force against the rocky barrier, so that the skull was shattered, and, with mouth, eyes, and nostrils giving blood, the body fell limp and lifeless. To lessen danger of discovery, this corpse was sent to join the others in the stony bed of the stream below.

CHAPTER XXXI.

ARRIVAL OF KONESSET.

KONESSET had successfully made his way out of the mountains and traversed the rivers and plains which lay before him, and the capital at last was near. Among others of the arts his Indian friend had taught him was that of disfigurement and disguise. He was, therefore, able now to mask his identity. Selecting a lonely spot in the heart of a thicket, he effected the change. His old garments were carefully concealed, and he stepped again into the road, completely metamorphosed. In the sturdy Hindoo, standing upon the highway, even a mother's eye would not have detected Konesset.

In this guise he made his way to the city. Entering its gates, he loudly proclaimed himself through the streets as Morari, Prince of Indian Jugglers, come from Upper Hindostan to amuse the king, Norodom, and his lovely queen. As he thus cried aloud he would leap

and spring, casting wonderful somersaults, and performing feats of astonishing strength and agility. The populace gathered in admiring throngs, and followed, loudly applauding, as he made his way toward the royal quarters. At the approach of the noisy crowd the massive gates of the palace were hastily closed, and the soldiers summoned to positions of defense.

At the sight of such warlike demonstrations the clamorous mob, familiar with the character of Norodom and of his underlings, were seized with panic, fearful that the archers would open upon them. They fled in confusion, and the stranger was left alone, in front of the threatening inclosure. Dismissing timidity, the garrison now cast the portal open, and a body of swordsmen rushed out upon Konesset and roughly made him prisoner.

Here was an opportunity for the commandant of the household troops to figure, in the eyes of his sovereign, as a warrior of remarkable watchfulness and courage; and accordingly a serious revolt was reported. It was declared that the people, under lead of the Hindoo, had risen and made a determined assault upon the palace, which, by the promptness of that officer, had been completely foiled.

Receiving this intelligence, the king ordered the captive at once before him. When the latter appeared, Anirah was seated beside Norodom. Konesset prostrated himself before the angry monarch, who, in fiercest tones, demanded his name and purpose.

“Most Excellent, Glorious Sovereign of Land and Sea,” was the answer, “Lord of the Celestial Elephant; Lord of all White Elephants; Master of Sakya, the Supernatural Weapon; Sovereign Controller of the

present state of existence ; Great King of Righteousness, and Object of Worship ! thine unworthy slave is named Morari, and he cometh from Sacred Behar, upon the banks of the Ganges, in the kingdom of Magadha. Ragoba, my brother, hath long been of Atonga, within the dominion of the Sovereign of Sovereigns, and attached to the household of the high mandarin, Alompra, distinguished father of the worshipful queen. From distant Behar had I come, to see once more him from whom I had been so long parted, when Ragoba, assuring me of the favor of our gracious mistress, urged me to seek fortune at the capital of Cambodia, rather than return to the land of my nativity."

Anirah was astonished, and at the same time delighted. Here was an unexpected opportunity of receiving intelligence from relatives and friends at Atonga, and particularly from Konesset, whom she had left suffering and in a precarious condition. She said nothing, however, until her lord had finished his close and suspicious interrogation relative to the reported uprising and attack upon the palace. These questions were all answered with utmost candor, and in such manner as even to impress favorably the fierce interlocutor.

CHAPTER XXXII.

TIDINGS FROM ATONGA.

By this incident, so unexpected, the queen had been cast into such a state of agitation that, even after the king was silent, she was not able immediately to control

her voice. At last, however, she repressed her excitement, and, in turn, questioned the juggler.

“What token hast thou,” she asked, “to prove that thou art, indeed, the brother of Ragoba? Never have I heard our venerable and faithful servant make mention of such a relative.”

“Oh, Most Gracious and Worshipful Mistress!” he replied, “I have the means of dispelling doubt. Ragoba bade me recall the day when thou, being yet little more than an infant, he found thee in thy father’s garden, beneath the trees, thy playmate a serpent of deadly fang; and how he stood a moment transfixed with horror, and then sought to slay the venomous reptile. Thou, in the innocence of childhood, didst plead for the life of thy dangerous playfellow.”

“Truly,” responded the queen, “what thou hast related I remember well; but this may have been told thee by the good old man, loving as he does to recount the incidents of the happy past. Doubtless thou hast other proofs?”

“Further evidence I have,” he answered, “and more convincing. My brother confided to my care, for delivery to thee, this necklace of black pearls, so long worn by thy lamented mother. It had lain long in the casket of silver, with other treasures, until, danger approaching, thou didst charge Ragoba with its keeping.”

As this was said, Morari raised himself slightly and drew the circlet from his bosom. It was folded in palm-leaves, and, as he departed from Atonga, had been carefully concealed about his person. At a sign, an attendant took it upon a golden platter, and, creeping upon hands and knees, laid it at the feet of his royal mistress. Norodom graciously picked it up and handed it to Ani-

rah, who received it with emotion. Carefully, and almost religiously, she undid the wrapping, until the chain itself lay exposed. Recognizing the precious relic, it brought to her mind a flood of tender recollections, and her tears were with difficulty restrained.

“Now, indeed,” she said, “do I credit thine assertion, and know thee to be the brother of Ragoba; yet it is strange that thou bearest no token from Konesset. Surely thou hast tidings of him as well as of other relatives, and of the friends and servants of our household?”

“Most Gracious Queen and Mistress,” was the reply, “I thank thee for this wondrous condescension. Friends and relations and domestics are well and prospering, except, indeed, our master, Konesset. Concerning him I hesitate to deliver my message of sadness.”

Now Morari paused, as though unwilling to continue without further permission. His true motive was to accord his sister a moment of preparation for the coming shock. Anirah, seriously alarmed, was anxious to learn all, and hastily bade him proceed. Thus urged, Morari resumed :

“Thy brother, Most Gracious Queen,” he said, “recovering partially from his wounds, and unable to bear the suspense of longer separation from those he loved, made the effort to follow them to the capital, but perished in the attempt. At the instance of Ragoba I have come to bear the sad intelligence.”

Notwithstanding the precaution that had been taken, the effect of these words upon Anirah was overpowering. She sat for a moment unsteady, and then, losing consciousness, fell upon the bosom of Norodom. He, holding her tenderly, commanded all to retire; in-

structing Morari, however, to remain in the palace until summoned again. Then, gently, in his own arms, he bore his lovely burden to her chamber and laid her upon the couch.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

ROMANCE OF MORARI.

DURING the following day Morari received a summons from the queen. He had been looking forward to such a call with great anxiety, uneasy for the effect upon Anirah of the sad intelligence he considered it necessary to impart. When ushered into her presence he cast a scrutinizing glance upon the countenance of his sister. Her eyes were red and swollen and moist with rebellious tears. The cheeks themselves were wet, and pearly drops were clinging to the lashes. These evidences of distress filled him with remorse, and he was strongly tempted to cast disguise aside and relieve her sorrow. His better judgment, however, restrained him, satisfied as he was of the wisdom of the course he was pursuing. Therefore, but not without difficulty, he repressed his feelings, and lay in silence, prostrate before the throne.

The queen, still deeply moved, was not able at once to speak. Norodom, sitting beside her, was uttering low words of comfort, until finally she was more composed.

“Tell us,” she asked, “when and how died my brother Konesset?”

“Most Gracious and Worshipful Queen and Mis-

dress!" Morari answered, "in my presence he was slain. Too impatient to wait upon the departure of a caravan, he undertook the dangerous journey without an escort, hoping by stealth to accomplish it in safety.

"I, being also desirous of reaching the capital, begged permission to accompany him, and it was graciously accorded. With infinite toil the mountains were attained, where the robber-bands of Kai Tau find their harbor. We had penetrated almost to their very heart, traveling by night and resting by day.

"One morning, overcome by fatigue, we were sleeping soundly, when the brigands surprised us in our place of hiding. It was the hard fate of the master to be killed before he could spring from earth or defend himself, and I, at his side, was left for dead.

"Many hours after the murderers were gone, the cool air and the dew of night revived me. Satisfying myself that the master was dead, I left his remains in the cavern, and, to preserve them from the beasts, rolled a stone against its mouth. Then, wounded and suffering, and with great difficulty, I made my way back to Atonga, bearing to Ragoba the sad intelligence. Even before complete recovery I determined again to attempt the passage, that thou mightest be informed of the master's fate. On this occasion, more fortunate, I was able to escape the dangers of the mountains and reach the capital."

As Anirah listened to this graphic account of the trials and imaginary death of Konesset her tears fell in profusion. When the recital was concluded, and her attention released, her grief became uncontrollable, and she burst forth into broken sobs. Norodom sought to comfort her, but she seemed beyond the reach of con-

solation. Again Konesset was tempted to relieve her sore distress, but again he yielded to conviction of the wisdom of his course.

The king, desiring privacy, again signaled Morari and the attendants to withdraw. Upon the following day the royal proclamation issued, commanding the people of Cambodia and its dependencies to mourn the brother of the queen, during the period, and with all the ceremonies, as in case of a prince of the royal blood. The mandate was obeyed ; even Konesset apparently sorrowing for himself.

Mahagua, receiving the tidings conveyed in the proclamation, rejoiced. His burning hatred of Alompra's family had been inflamed by the flagellation received, and which he attributed solely to Anirah. He considered two of his enemies fortunately disposed of, and the fact that their doom had been the result of his own machinations was to him a source of additional gratification. The third, and in his eyes the principal offender, was doubly bereaved, and, even during the short period of her ascendancy, would be deprived of gladness. He looked forward exultingly to the day when, the precarious fire of Norodom's love burned out, Anirah, like so many of her predecessors, should fall from grace. Then would his vengeance be complete.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

BETTER DAYS.

FOR previous victims the fancy of Cambodia's licentious monarch had indeed been fleeting. In this

instance, however, there seemed a notable exception. Time appeared only to cement and strengthen the ties binding together the hearts of Norodom and Anirah. The influence of Cambodia's queen was paramount. Her dominion was gentle, and directed toward the happiness of the people, so long and severely tried. Indeed, through her sweet and beneficent intervention, the evils that afflicted them were all eradicated. The flock of wicked courtiers who had swarmed about the king, exciting him from one excess to another greater, was dispersed. Losing, in the charm of her companionship, all taste for such riotous association, the sovereign readily consented to their departure. Then the offices of the government were purged. Those of their incumbents who had been tyrannical or corrupt now met the punishment their crimes deserved, and their places were filled with others more honorable and pure. The tribunals of justice again entertained and fairly determined all controversies presented, and enforced with vigor the laws of the land. The army, instead of being engaged in domineering over the people and in plundering them, or in conducting wars of injustice, were set to the more salutary task of extirpating the bands of pirates and robbers that swarmed through the country and infested its seas and the rivers. By measures such as these the morals of the nation were purified, and the criminal classes compelled to reform, or abandon the realm, so that serious offenses became matters of rare occurrence. The inhabitants of one province might leave their homes without anxiety, and even traverse the kingdom from end to end, with no one to molest them.

To these reformatations Anirah was impelled not only

by motives of charity toward his subjects, but also by another as high and holy—that of reclaiming her lord from ways of evil, and of purifying his fame. As though under the strong influence of some happy spell, Norodom yielded readily to each virtuous suggestion.

Relieved from the constant gloom and terror which had long oppressed them, with contented hearts and new energy the people now applied themselves to their various avocations. Their condition improved rapidly, and trade and commerce were wonderfully revived. The waters of Cambodia—her rivers, lakes, and seas—were gladdened by the perpetual passing of countless junks, and of crafts of every size and character, laden deep with precious cargoes. The vessels of China and Japan, and those of other lands, sought her shores, and peacefully disposed of their wares, taking others in exchange, to the profit and advantage of all concerned.

As if to indemnify this people for the sufferings of the past, Nature appeared to have entered into league with this beneficent queen. The earth became unusually prolific, rewarding generously the labors of the husbandman, and bringing forth of its fruits in astonishing abundance, while the useful animals multiplied in a manner unprecedented.

All who observed the change were filled with wonder, and were at a loss to comprehend the nature of the mysterious influence that had wrought it. Unable otherwise to account for it, the populace concluded that Anirah must be some embodiment of godly power, descended to relieve them of their miseries. Only celestial force, they thought, could thus chain the fickleness of their sovereign's disposition or curb the violence

of his passions. As one possessed of powers supernal, they venerated and adored her, erecting in her honor images which received their worship. As such divinity she has passed into the traditions of the people, taking high place in Cambodian mythology as the Goddess of Mercy.

CHAPTER XXXV.

COMING OF THE PRINCE.

IN the course of time Anirah bore a son to the king. The auspicious event was a source of pride and satisfaction to the royal father, linking his heart more strongly to the happy mother. The little one was welcomed with due formality and ceremonies appropriate to the occasion, and a general jubilee was again proclaimed. The people, now happily relieved from all their burdens, entered with spirit into the consequent festivities, extending them of their own accord beyond the period fixed in the decree. For weeks the land was transformed, presenting one broad and general scene of joy and feasting. The celebration partook, among the populace, of the character of a religious demonstration, and was prosecuted with unusual energy and splendor. Thus they sought to testify homage and gratitude toward one considered as a goddess, and to further propitiate her favor.

The boy was strong, and gratified the father by striking resemblance to himself. He survived the many perils that wait so closely upon the days of early infancy, and the mother regained health and strength,

having added to her attractions the indescribable charm maternity itself so often accords.

Five years or more had rolled by since the date of Anirah's arrival at the capital, and yet her position seemed firm as ever. During all this time Konesset, greatly rejoiced, was coming almost to the conclusion that the happy state of affairs was to be permanent. He was often moved to abandon his masquerade, and add to the joys of Anirah that of fraternal love and association. He also himself yearned to embrace his sister and her child, and receive in return their endearing caresses. He could not, however, ignore the solemn warnings of Ragoba, and there was ever within his own bosom a presentiment that the future was not without its changes.

Meanwhile he had become a fixture in the palace, and won the favor of Norodom and his queen. From motives of policy he had abstained from the acceptance of any place of trust or prominence. He had solicited and obtained appointment as guardian of the royal armory, the duties of which position he faithfully discharged. There remained, nevertheless, much time that was legitimately his own. This was valuable, enabling him to study closely the internal arrangements and external surroundings of the palace, and to make friends with servants and soldiers of the household, and citizens beyond its precincts. He had been particularly attentive to an aged officer named Prenawa, the supreme custodian of the building itself, and of the grounds within its inclosures. So successful were his advances in this quarter that the venerable man, who had survived all relatives of his blood, came to consider Konesset as a son, deriving pleasure accordingly from his attentions and marks of affection.

In bestowing these evidences of regard the latter was not actuated by policy alone. He had, it is true, commenced to cultivate the favor of this official from motives of interest, but the gentle amiability of Prenawa had won the heart of Konesset, notably open and of easy access. Thus it transpired that there sprung up between the pair an affection that was strong and sincere.

The purpose of the younger of the two, in originally seeking the friendship of the other, was to secure a knowledge of the secret chambers and passages that must exist under and about the palace. These, by virtue of his office, were known to the custodian, and familiarity with them might prove, in case of peril, invaluable to Konesset.

Out of caution, he was slow in his advances toward securing the desired information. Nothing demanded haste, and he was loth, by precipitation, to arouse the suspicions of Prenawa, or cause him to doubt the sincerity of his friendly professions. His spare time was largely devoted to the performance of the minor duties of his friend, upon whom the years were pressing heavily, and who received with gratitude the services Konesset rendered. Ascertaining by experience the trustworthiness of his voluntary assistant, by degrees the guardian of the palace yielded more and more to his care. Thus, one by one, the secrets of the palace were all acquired. At the same time Prenawa, upon whom the laborious duties of his office were resting with increasing weight, now found the repose to which he was entitled by reason of his age.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE VALLEY OF THE SORCERER.

DURING all this time Mahagua was closely and anxiously watching affairs at the palace, expecting some sign of the change he so earnestly desired, and which was postponed so far beyond his anticipations. He had thus been waiting three years or more, when his father died, leaving him as only heir. Pending the long and enforced delay, Mahagua's craving for vengeance was strengthening day by day, absorbing his every power and thought, until it became, as it were, his nature itself. Life to him was agony, so rendered by rage and disappointment. Nevertheless, he bore it all, without thought of abandoning the cruel chase upon which he had set himself.

The estates about Atonga, as such, were of no avail to him in the condition of mind in which he was. Recognizing, however, the value of ready money in the accomplishment of his designs, he resolved to dispose of all, and transfer his wealth to the capital. There he could be ever present, prepared to seize upon favoring circumstances.

He availed himself of the first opportunity of parting with these possessions, even at a sacrifice. While detained in the city of his birth, he made inquiries concerning the reported death of Konesset, but in such manner as not to attract attention. What he learned was sufficient to destroy his faith in the story Morari had related.

Upon first learning of the destruction of his enemy, Mahagua had possessed himself of all particulars, and it

was to verify or disprove them that he had entered upon this investigation. He found in Atonga no one that had heard of the coming from Hindostan of a brother to Ragoba. He ascertained also that Konesset had undertaken his journey alone, and none were aware of the return of a wounded man. These circumstances satisfied Mahagua that the recital of the juggler was a fiction. He now remembered that in the figure and appearance of the latter, as he first beheld them, there had been something seemingly familiar. The impression, however, at the time was faint and speedily forgotten. In the light of late discoveries it returned, and he became convinced that the pretended Morari was none other than Konesset himself. He could readily understand the motive of the latter in originally assuming a disguise; but why it should be persevered in, after years had apparently removed its necessity, he could not comprehend.

It was a terrible disappointment to the vindictive man to find that his vengeance was not so nearly complete as he had supposed. He felt that the wicked task his passion had set before him, in view of the survival of Konesset, was rendered more difficult and uncertain. Nevertheless, his purpose of destroying those he chose to consider his enemies was fixed more firmly than ever. The unwelcome discovery rendered his hate more furious, while his patience was materially reduced. He grew doubtful, at last, of any change in Norodom's feelings toward his queen, and determined to seek in other quarters the means of hastening the catastrophe.

He was too solicitous of success to permit even his growing impatience to urge him into an attempt of any kind precarious in its nature. The task he had un-

dertaken was beset by difficulties ; for, in view of the known treachery and unrelenting vindictiveness of this enemy, from the beginning abundant precautions had been taken and maintained to prevent violence or injury to the queen. Indeed, it was owing entirely to the gentle and forgiving spirit of her against whom he was plotting that the villain owed his life and freedom ; for she would listen to no suggestion calculated to punish him for the past or restrain him for the future, so long, at least, as he did nothing further to violate the law.

It was now that Mahagua, abandoning hope of success by natural means, directed his thoughts toward the supernatural. In the far East sorcery has always had a home, playing frequently an important part in the affairs of individuals, and even of communities. It was natural, therefore, for Mahagua, in his present frame of mind, toward it to turn his hopes.

Close upon the eastern coast of what is now known as the Gulf of Siam, and connected with it, was a placid and beautiful lake. Its wide expanse was usually smooth as the polished surface of a mirror, though marked at times by coursing ripples, or stirred by undulating wavelets, that swept gracefully from shore to shore. Rarely was its bosom lashed to fury, for the surrounding hills protected it from the rush of the hurricane and the rage of the fierce typhoon. Its waters were profound, and so pellucid that the round and shiny pebbles at its bottom, far fathoms down, were clear and distinct. On all sides the sloping banks descended, clothed with verdure to the very margin of its tide. Around its circuit were frequent clusters of trees, heavy and widespread, their sweeping branches extended over its edge, and at places

trailing in the waters. Their graceful outlines and rich foliage were reflected in the depths, thus duplicating all their beauties. Above, the heavens seemed a perpetual blue, with ever-passing clouds, which, as they moved slowly along, loved to tarry for a moment above this wonderful lake, to contemplate their images in its placid deepness.

Around it, on every side except that toward the gulf, in magnificent horse-shoe, stood a circle of wooded hills, behind which rose successive and distinct chains of increasing altitude, until, farther away, the blue peaks reached to the clouds themselves. Within their compass was a charming valley, composed of lands elevated and low, level and undulating, open, and carpeted with rich and flowery grasses, or shaded by trees of beautiful variety and exquisite foliage.

In one spot alone was there aught to mar the grace of this expanse—a low morass, densely overgrown, lying between it and the Gulf of Siam, and through which, to the latter, the waters of the lake found exit. Even this, like a mole on the face of a beautiful woman, seemed there placed for the purpose of heightening, by contrast, the surrounding loveliness. Altogether, it would appear as though this glorious valley had been specially created by Divine Beneficence as a paradise upon earth, where men and all animated creatures might dwell in joy and harmony.

Nevertheless, upon or within the limpid waters of this lake no living creature swam. No bird flitted across the green meads or perched amid the rich foliage of the trees. No beast nibbled the tender and juicy grasses that spread luxuriantly over the open spaces, or sought shelter under the branches of the inviting groves.

Men themselves avoided the smiling spot as a place accursed ; for of those who entered amid its varied charms, few escaped, as a consequence, scorching fevers and agonizing pains, terminating in death.

It was in the morass, toward the gulf, that Khoplé, the Sorcerer of the East, had made his home. There, despite the character of his surroundings, so injurious and fatal to others, he had abided for more than a hundred years.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE ABODE OF THE SORCERER.

THE evil fame of this professor of the black arts had spread far and near through Cambodia and all adjacent nations. Demons and evil spirits of every sort were his familiars, and no man, not impelled by unholy motives, approached his haunts. He was held in general execration, and to him was ascribed every misfortune that befell the people. Such was the universal and superstitious dread he inspired, that even kings trembled at his power and were afraid of his displeasure.

Toward this being the thoughts of Mahagua naturally turned so soon as he resolved to invoke the aid of sorcery, and he determined upon a journey to the abode of this man of magic. He traced a Brahmin astrologer, reported years before to have visited the wizard Khoplé for light upon some point of intricacy in the starry science. From this person information was obtained sufficient to serve in finding the spot where dwelt the sorcerer.

Mahagua slipped quietly from the capital, and, after much and fatiguing travel, reached the mountains encircling the baleful valley. Aware of its frightful reputation, he avoided the vale, skirting along until he attained to the Gulf of Siam. Upon the firm white sand of its beach he continued his journey, till he came at last to the morass in whose depths was the dwelling-place of him he sought. Scanning carefully its outer edge for a break or avenue through which he might penetrate the mass of tangled vegetation, he discovered an opening, low and narrow, extending far back into the heart of the thicket. Lying end to end, and so traversing its entire length, were huge trunks of trees, serving as a rude causeway across the matted roots and noisome waters which lay upon the ground.

Supposing this to be the approach to the habitation of Khoplé, he entered without hesitation. The passage, however, was by no means easy. Briers and strong shoots grew rank and thick on either side, arching above and descending in places so low, that by creeping alone he could make his way. Perpetual dampness had decayed the logs, covering them with slimy moss that was in the highest degree slippery and difficult to the footing.

Mahagua's perseverance was finally rewarded, and he came to the end of this leafy tunnel. It terminated in an open space within the jungle. Here the soil was higher, and raised itself a little above the level of the stagnant waters.

In the center of this area stood a low, rude hovel, surrounded by filthy pools, in each of which were huge crocodiles that the sorcerer fed daily with his own hands. The reptiles now lay staring with astonishment, their

green and hideous eyes full of malice, and their great jaws opening wide. Thorny inclosures were likewise scattered about, in which were confined serpents of deadliest venom, all terribly excited by the intrusion of a stranger, rearing aloft their dreadful heads, spitting and hissing, and their hoods swelling out with anger. Hither and thither, through the mud or over the sides and the roof of the cabin, in great numbers darted centipedes and scorpions and other stinging creatures, and insects and lizards of disgusting appearance, each crying according to his nature, and together raising a horrid din. Adding to the clamor, the crocodiles soon began to bellow, rending the air with deep and appalling roars. As if to be in keeping with these vile accompaniments, the atmosphere itself was heavily laden with foul and poisonous vapors.

The condition of affairs, fearful as it was, grew more terrifying as Mahagua pushed toward the hut. The scaly monsters, who had been lying sluggishly in their slimy holes, recovering from the astonishment which at first possessed them, now became belligerent, and seemingly bent upon the destruction of the intruder. They crawled toward him with rapid movement and menacing aspect. At the same time the venomous reptiles and stinging insects, that so abounded, commenced to swarm in threatening masses, as though about to overwhelm him with their numbers. The position of Mahagua seemed perilous indeed, but he pressed forward with unshaken courage, as though unmindful of these aggressive demonstrations. In a few seconds, however, even he was convinced that his last hour had arrived; but, at the moment of supreme peril, there came from the hovel a voice harsh and grating, and more hideous, even,

than the bellowings of the crocodiles. As it pierced the air, higher and louder than the prevailing clamor, a marvelous change was noticeable in the furious throng. The wide-mouthed monsters closed their hideous jaws and slunk back to their filthy pools, burrowing deep into the ooze and slime, while the scorpions and other stinging creatures hurried each to find some place of hiding. In another instant, he at whose utterance these deadly reptiles fled in terror, the sorcerer himself, stood before Mahagua.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

KHOPLÉ, THE SORCERER.

THE figure now confronting Mahagua was in keeping with the harsh voice that had issued from the cabin and subdued the belligerent natures of his reptile associates. The trunk was long and bulky, supported upon legs short and thick-set, while arms far-reaching and brawny extended down almost to the ankles. The neck, heavy, like that of a bull, upheld a head preternaturally large, with an appearance of softness and distention, as though swollen beyond its original proportions. On either side the stiff ears stood out boldly. The eyes, sunk in deep sockets, and overhung by heavy, inky brows, were small and rounded, glittering like those of a serpent. The mouth was huge and misshapen, closed by lips exuberant and brutal, through which great teeth protruded, like the tusks of a boar. The skin was discolored in spots, and further disfigured by offensive blotches, like those of a man stricken with

leprosy. Altogether, his appearance was sufficiently terrifying and forbidding to affright the stoutest heart. Mahagua, however, was of an exceptional nature, and absolutely insensible to fear. As the sorcerer stood before him he scanned him from head to foot, noting carefully each repulsive peculiarity.

Khoplé was the first to break the silence. Speaking in guttural and discordant tones, he thus addressed Mahagua :

“Thou art Mahagua,” he said, “and hast no need to explain the purpose of this visit, for to me the wheeling stars reveal all earthly secrets. Thou it was who, coming from Atonga, bore to the king the knowledge of the maiden Anirah, and of her surpassing charms. This thou didst, hoping to wreak dire revenge upon her, and upon her father Alompra and her brother Konesset. Thou it is who hast seen thy schemes coming to naught, or redounding to the advantage of those thou wouldst destroy. Now, no longer content to await with patience upon time and circumstance, and driven to fury by thy passion, thou seekest my aid in the accomplishment of thy vengeance. I may tell thee that thy waiting was in vain ; for never, in the order of Nature, will the queen of Cambodia lose dominion over the heart of its sovereign. The protection of Pra-Enn, King of Angels, is about her, and against him even I am impotent.”

Here the wizard relapsed into silence, fastening his basilisk eyes upon Mahagua, who stood for a moment as though overwhelmed by these startling revelations. He was particularly stunned by the announcement that his enemies were entirely beyond his reach. His heart sank at the apparent hopelessness of his task, so rendered by a divine force against which it was impossible to cope.

Recovering himself, after a time, the thought presented itself that, perchance, the sorcerer could invoke the intervention of the mightiest of all the Powers of Darkness to counteract the influence of Pra-Enn, and bring about the accomplishment of the object for which he had striven so long. He was about to address the enchanter, but, before he could utter a word, the latter interrupted.

“Needless it is,” he said, “for thee to give expression to the thought. To me thy mind is clear as the waters of yon lake, or the air of the valley which lies beyond it. Thou deemest that, though out of the reach of my powers, the task thou wouldst impose may be possible to the might of my master, the Prince of Demons. Great is his potency, but supreme indeed must be the need which could impel a mortal to appeal to his dread majesty.”

“Urgent indeed are my necessities,” hastily ejaculated Mahagua. “The insolence and triumph of my enemies must be punished. To me these foes are living insults, and their presence upon earth is galling and intolerable. Their prosperity and immunity fill me with fury, and with an anguish that is beyond all other suffering. There is no hell so deep or dreadful whose pains I would not willingly accept in exchange for the pangs of my ungratified revenge, if, by so doing, I might crush the ones I hate.”

As he spoke these words Mahagua’s eyes flashed fire; his bosom heaved, and every limb shook with the fury of passion. Standing thus, he would have furnished a fitting model for the delineation of intensest hate and demoniac lust after revenge.

“Thou sayest what is terrible,” responded the other. “To invoke the assistance of Maqui, Prince of all De-

mons, is an awful thing, and only at fearful cost may his aid be secured."

"Be it as it may," interrupted Mahagua. "Freely will I incur all penalties to prevail at last over those who so long have baffled me."

"The power of Pra-Enn, King of Angels, is almost supreme," the sorcerer answered, "and even the mightiest of the Powers of Darkness, ordinarily, is unable to measure with him. Here, however, by his past crimes Norodom has given himself over to the Potentates of Evil. Of his destiny these have control, and even the Angel King, in its regard, is voiceless. Perchance my master, if he so desires, may part the royal couple, and bring the queen from her high station, or reach her soul by visiting calamities upon him she loves. Separation from him would be misery to her, and every evil heaped upon her lord would press as well upon her heart. Thus might thy vengeance possibly be attained. It were vain, however, to invoke the master's intervention unless thou art willing to deliver thyself unconditionally into his absolute dominion, to be cast, at his pleasure, into torment."

"And must I place myself thus at his mercy," demanded Mahagua, "with no certainty of his ability or desire to render service in return?"

"It is so written," Khoplé responded, "in the immutable laws of the realms of darkness. The demons bind themselves by no pledges. None need solicit their interference who are unwilling to render up soul and being as a sacrifice."

Mahagua remained some moments in deep and silent study. Such were the violence of his hatred and the fierce promptings of his revenge, that the certainty of

hell was not the obstacle to immediate acquiescence in the proposal of the wizard. His unwillingness was to placing himself completely in the power of the Evil One, who, by plunging him at once into the pit, could destroy all hope of vengeance.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

STORY OF KHOPLÉ.

As Mahagua continued the debate within himself, the sorcerer broke in upon the silence.

“Hesitation is useless,” he said, “for ere long it is doomed to come to an end. Thou wilt at last be glad to appeal upon any terms to the power of the demons. Whether the master will serve thee or not, I am unable to declare ; for, from all, his mind and mighty purposes are hidden. This much, however, I may affirm : without his aid thou canst never harm so much as a hair upon the heads of those thou hatest. Depending alone upon thyself, thou wouldst live to see them continue in the sovereign’s favor, passing contentedly down the pathway of life to an old age of happiness, and a death of peace and quietness.

“I have myself known the bitterness of helpless fury and impotent revenge. They drove me long ago to enter into the dreadful compact, when other hope was gone. To me the master hath graciously extended favor, granting at least a partial gratification to the fierce cravings that consumed me. The price, to be

paid some day, fearful as it is, I deem as light in the balance, opposed to what has been accorded me."

The preoccupation of Mahagua did not prevent his being attracted to what the sorcerer was saying. He was astonished to find, in the one who stood before him, a being that had felt, as he himself had done, the deep stirrings of hate, and been driven by the thirst of vengeance even farther than he as yet had gone. His curiosity was excited, and he was anxious to learn more of one who, doubtless, had had heart-burning experiences as tormenting as his own.

"What thou hast said," he answered, "interests me much. Thou, as well as myself, hast, no doubt, endured grievous wrongs; but to thee has been given the joy of satisfied revenge. Having disclosed that which excites my interest, thou, to whom by magic arts my story stands revealed, wilt surely not deny me possession of thine own?"

"When the human heart is filled with fury like to mine," Khoplé responded, "its fires nothing can quench. All of evil I have heaped upon my enemies, and all that in a thousand centuries I might impose upon them, can not soften the fierce cravings of my soul. The history of all I have endured I will recite; but the horrors of the actuality no one may comprehend but he who has experienced it.

"Into this world I was brought hideous and misshapen. This was through no fault of mine, yet the father that begat me turned with loathing from me, vowing that I was no child of his. Even the mother that bore me shrieked with terror and disgust when her eyes first rested upon her babe, protesting that I was no human, but that some vile demon had played upon her.

They cast me from them, thrusting me out of the low hovel, in the dead of night, to be devoured by beasts of prey. These, however, were more merciful than they who had given me being. Prowling hyenas, that slunk through the darkness in search of food, found and adopted the outcast. A bitch that had lost a whelp brought me to her lair and suckled me as her own. Thus I gained strength, never doubting but that I was of a kind with the brutes that reared me. For years I ran with such associates, upon fours, living as they lived and feeding as they fed. At last, with one companion, I was trapped and brought from the jungles to the dwelling-places of humanity. Confined with my fellow in a cage of iron, I was considered a curiosity so rare that thousands flocked to gaze upon me.

“The governor of the province, seeing here an opportunity to please his master, seized upon me and my companion, forwarding his prize as a gift to the monarch who ruled the kingdom of Kalinga. Brought into contact with men, my mind awakened, and I learned, slowly at first, and then more rapidly, to speak the human language. Still, during all this time I remained the man-hyena, and was kept, to satisfy the notions of the king, long years in company of the beast that had been taken with me. Naturally, as my faculties developed, such contact became repulsive; but my entreaties were of no avail. What cared they for my comfort or my feelings?

“I learned, in time, that my wretched parents, who years before had cast me forth to perish, recognizing me after capture by my deformities, and finding that I had become a thing of value, laid formal claim for my possession. The governor, who first had seized me,

paid no attention to their petition ; but they, greedy and persistent, as they had been heartless, brought it up to the king himself, who, pleased by his acquisition, extended to them liberal bounties.

“Is it to be wondered at that a being receiving such treatment from his kind, and particularly from those whose blood coursed within his veins, should feel the bitterest hate against his race, and especially against such recreant progenitors, longing to visit upon them all the sternest retribution ? Should it excite astonishment to learn that I had turned with disgust and horror from gods and spirits that fostered and protected such monsters, and loved and worshiped the demons that scourged them ?

“After a period of such detestable captivity, seeming an eternity, through the intervention of Maqui, Prince of Demons, I escaped. The king, whose arbitrary caprice had so long confined me as a brute, and the keeper who had practiced his numberless barbarities upon me, both perished by my hand. Then, in the dead hour of the night, I burst into the hut of the infamous couple who had brought me into the world, and rudely aroused them from the last of their peaceful slumbers. At sight of my misshapen form, trembling with fury, and of my face, always hideous, now additionally distorted by rage, they were speechless with horror, and lay as though paralyzed. Placing upon each a grasp that was resistless, I dragged them with me as I went. The dense wildernesses through which, in earlier years, I had often prowled with beastly companions in skulking packs, were still familiar, despite my long confinement. Into their very heart, through places which the foot of no man but myself had ever

trodden, I dragged the pair, bruised by rocks and lacerated by thorns, and almost dead with terror.

“ Within these wilds, beyond possibility of human succor, I repaid in part the fearful debt I owed them. The old age they had hoped, upon the rich bounty of the king, to spend in peace and contentment, I made full of torment. Their cries of misery and deep groans of agony were perpetual music to my hungry ears. Carefully supporting their strength, lest they should cheat me by dying too soon, I kept them long in anguish, until death at last released them from my clutches. Then did I leave the land of my nativity, as hateful to me, seeking refuge in this spot. Here, for long years, have I served with zeal my masters, the demons, in the task of scourging humanity. It is here, and by me, that are concocted the mighty poisons which taint the air and load it with sweeping pestilences and destroying plagues. From blood of the crocodile, the venom of serpents, and the sting of insects and reptiles, do I brew them ; and hundreds of thousands succumb, in all lands and among all races, to their terrible yet subtile influence. Before accomplishing these things, or gaining this power, I pledged all to my dread master, and await his pleasure for the coming of the day when the stipulations of my compact are to be enforced. Yet am I not appalled, for, hating men as I do, I would rather be a witness of their anguish in hell than be forced to contemplate, even while participating in, their felicity in heaven.”

CHAPTER XL.

FRESH COALS.

WHILE the sorcerer had been delivering himself of this weird history, the memory of his wrongs kindled into a glow the fierce fires that burned within him. His utterance was subdued and strained, often through clenched teeth. His eyes were like coals before the bellows, and his shaggy brows drew up into a single mass of bristling hair. The lips worked convulsively as he spoke, and the foam stood on them, as upon the chops of a rabid dog. Indeed, such was the fury and malice graven upon the wizard's hideous countenance, that his auditor was tempted to believe that it was in truth a demon that stood before him, and that this story of humanity was the merest fabrication. When, however, the enchanter concluded, and remained for a time silent and almost overcome by aroused passion, the astonishment of Mahagua gave way to thoughts more personal to himself. He was still unwilling to submit himself unconditionally to the power of the Evil One, hoping, perchance, time might crown his own efforts with success, or, at all events, that the infernal powers might become in the future less arbitrary and exacting. When the sorcerer was sufficiently calm, Mahagua announced his conclusion.

“Go, then,” Khoplé responded, “but, before the year is half elapsed, thou wilt become convinced of thine own impotence, and come again, prepared to venture all in the hope of profiting by the intervention of the master. When thou so dost, as an offering of propitiation to be laid upon the altar-stone in the darkness

of his temple, bring thou the heart of a virgin, torn by thine own hand from the palpitating bosom, and whose maiden love has been won by thee. Without this it were vain to approach."

As these words ended, the wizard turned abruptly, disappearing within the hut, and Mahagua was left alone. From the jungle the latter made his way to the beach, and breathed once more the sweet air wafted over the pure waters of the gulf. He hastened to the capital, and resumed his watch upon the palace. In various disguises he hung about its entrances, and around the royal landing-places, to catch glimpses of the royal couple.

When the king and queen were abroad, precautions were always taken, rendering it impossible for Mahagua to inflict harm upon the latter; but he longed for some token to encourage the hope, to which he still despairingly clung, that the vicious nature of Norodom would at last assert itself.

The uncertain and ever-varying condition of the river that ran in front of Cambodia's principal city left the banks, for some distance from the water's edge, usually in the condition of a quagmire. To enable the people to traverse this marshy area, causeways of lime and mortar had been constructed, long and narrow, and reaching to the landing-places immediately upon the stream. So narrow were these paths that it was impossible for persons to pass each other, and, when they met, those of inferior rank were compelled to take the mud.

It happened that Konesset and his friend Prenawa had been upon the river, and were returning to the palace. As they stepped upon the cemented way, Mahagua was advancing from the other end, and, through

his disguise, the keen eye of Konesset detected him at once. A glance, flashing and unguarded, from each satisfied the other that his identity was known.

By the servile customs of the land, Prenawa and Konesset, as servants of the sovereign, were in rank superior to Mahagua, and entitled to the right of passage. It was the duty of the latter, as they went by, to prostrate himself in the mire. Policy might have brought Mahagua to this had he not been aware that he was recognized. He could not, however, so abase his pride and subdue his hate as to render homage to his enemy, the latter knowing whence it came. Instead of stepping to the side, with curling lip and insulting sneer he stood his ground defiantly.

Being in his right, Konesset did not yield ; and so, for an instant, the two stood thus confronted. The latter was not a man of great patience or of many words. When satisfied that Mahagua did not intend to give way, he sprang forward and grasped him firmly with powerful hands, casting him off some distance into the mud.

Stung to fury by such rough and contemptuous treatment, and in his rage forgetting caution, Mahagua rose hastily, and, drawing a keen knife, rushed upon his enemy. Prenawa stood aghast, expecting to behold his friend fall victim to the furious assault. The latter faced his assailant, and, as the lunge was made, received it upon his left arm, on which was wrought a terrible gash, and with his right hand seized in powerful grip the wrist of Mahagua. Giving it a fierce wrench, he threw it contemptuously from him. The bones had been crushed and broken like pipe-stems, and the nerveless fingers released the steel, while the arm itself fell powerless.

CHAPTER XII.

THE FALSE PRIEST.

MAHAGUA'S animosity toward Konesset and his sister was, if possible, rendered by this occurrence more bitter than ever before. The delay, which so far had been hard to bear, was now absolutely intolerable. It determined the debate which, since the visit to the sorcerer, had been in progress within the mind of Mahagua. He was now resolved to venture all, and appeal to the demons for help.

His thoughts now turned to the accomplishment of the condition the wizard had imposed upon him. The task of compliance was dangerous and difficult. It was not that his spirit shrunk from the fearful sin. To secure the love of a virgin simply to sacrifice her, to him was a matter of utter indifference. All that troubled him was the difficulty and peril standing in his way. It was not the physical danger he dreaded; but he knew that, if detected in such a crime, all possibility of accomplishing his vengeful designs would be gone for ever.

He did not doubt his ability to win some maiden's affections, but his advances would be noticeable and hazardous. On the other hand, it would be difficult to satisfy his intended victim as to the necessity of secret wooing.

The time of confinement, while his wrist was healing, was occupied in efforts to solve the difficulties of this problem. The plan appearing most feasible was to enroll himself in the priesthood, by which means he might overcome the more serious obstacles.

The Buddhist monastery is open to all men of that creed, and it may be left at pleasure. In fact, in many Eastern lands every male is expected, at some time, to affiliate himself with the Sacred Sangha, for a period longer or shorter, according to circumstances and inclination. Although its members are at liberty at any moment to sever connection with it, until this be done its many rules must be rigorously observed.

Among other obligations, the monks are bound to the strictest chastity. From the numerous maxims that go to form the code by which their daily conduct is governed, a few may be furnished as illustrative :

“Give not flowers to a woman.” “Look not upon women to please your eyes.” “You sin if you speak to a woman in a secret place.” “You sin if you receive aught from the hands of a woman.” “You sin if you sit upon the same mat with a woman.” “You sin if, seeing a company of maidens, you cough or make other sounds to attract their attention.” These, with others similar, are mere preventives of a salutary nature, and are in addition to more important laws which visit severest penalties upon violations of priestly celibacy.

Mahagua considered that, while these restrictions might render more difficult the task of securing a virgin's love, they would render success in other respects more certain and facile. The first great obstacle overcome, and the notice of some maiden gained, there would be reason in his plea for secrecy of intercourse.

Arriving at this conclusion, he sought admission into the sacred order, adopting for the purpose the monastery most humble in its pretensions and remote in location. The formal examination was undergone,

and, with due ceremony, he was invested with the yellow robe. In obedience to the rules, he went upon daily rounds with ready bowl, from house to house, to receive the food the faithful gave for the support of the priests. This, and the other obligations of his new state, he discharged with regularity and apparent zeal.

In these expeditions of mendicancy he noted covertly the young women that he met, and those that dwelt in houses at which he stopped for contributions. Upon each he passed in judgment, studying as best he could her character, and weighing the surrounding influences, as calculated to favor or embarrass him. The religious sentiment of the people was strong, and he knew the vast majority of maidens would shrink from his professions of love. His advances, therefore, demanded the greatest circumspection. Even with the few that he selected, he pushed matters by degrees so cautious, and at first so nearly insensible, that he was able to judge of the utility of further efforts before seriously committing himself. With the larger number he was compelled to abandon the siege, almost before it was begun. Nevertheless, he found three, in different portions of the city, with whom his progress was secret and satisfactory. He thus multiplied operations, to be more certain of luring at least one to some hidden place fitted for the contemplated crime.

CHAPTER XLII.

PRETTY MESPÉ IN THE TOILS.

OF those so specially marked, above all was he successful with one, a pretty, timid creature, scarcely attained to puberty, and living upon the river-bank, immediately below the city. Her name was Mespé, one that was common in Cambodia. Her father was a fisherman, whose time was spent mostly upon the water. The gravest of all calamities that can happen to a girl had fallen upon her—the loss of a mother during earlier years. No fond maternal care had been there to train the tender mind and heart of this sweet child as she grew. The father, though loving, had not the knowledge or experience needed for the task of developing and strengthening her character, or of warning her against the dangers that beset young womanhood.

Notwithstanding her youth, Mespé, from necessity, was guardian and keeper of her father's house. His cabin was close upon the water, and solitary. In consequence of this isolation, and of her father's frequent absence, the maiden was much alone. She was just in the state of transition from infancy to young womanhood. Without guidance or experience, she was, in every way, in a condition to fall an easy prey to the insidious wiles of a villain. Surrounding circumstances rendered her particularly helpless, and facilitated the operations of Mahagua.

It were needless to detail the stages, cautious upon his part, but yet rapid, through which the affair progressed. It is sufficient to declare that he was able to wind himself into the affections of the pretty maid to

such an extent that she loved him with all the fervor of a virgin's earliest passion. She listened to his words with rapture, believing him possessed of all the attributes and virtues of perfect manhood. For her the hours of separation dragged themselves along as though interminable. Her confidence in his truth and wisdom was so implicit, that she yielded readily to his demand for secrecy of intercourse. Upon his part, the promise was given that he would eventually abandon the priesthood and make Mespé his wife. In the innocence of a heart pure and unsuspecting, she would meet Mahagua in secluded places; and so the courtship progressed without discovery.

Her childish ways and gentle manners grew to have a charm for Mahagua, and rendered her society agreeable to him. His bosom, however, had room but for a single sentiment, and toward its gratification alone his energies were bent. Despite the pleasure of this love-making—upon his part so treacherous—he knew that every day increased the danger of detection, and resolved to force the matter to its conclusion.

The inhabitants of Farther India residing along its great water-courses have always been of semi-aquatic habits. They are excellent swimmers, and even the women and children are experts in the handling of small boats. With Mespé it was customary to take one of her father's canoes and float on the tide, or propel herself with skillful paddle against it. Often had she thus gone forth to meet the tired fisherman upon his homeward way, or taken, for variety, some other course. Mahagua, therefore, having selected a secret place for the perpetration of the hideous crime he contemplated, found no difficulty in luring the maiden to it.

CHAPTER XLIII.

A DREADFUL CRIME.

ABOVE the city, at a distance from the home of Mespé, in the middle of the river, lay a bar or island of limited extent. It was flat, and often entirely covered by the flow of the stream ; and was exposed only during low or medium stages of water. It had never been desirable, or even fit, for the habitation of man, but was covered with small trees and thick undergrowth. Popular tradition, during generations, had woven around it the most horrible fancies, and it was shunned by a superstitious people. Passing boats, for fear of infringing upon the circle of its malign influence, kept away, far as possible.

Mahagua, fearing neither the natural nor the supernatural, recognized the fitness of this spot as a location for the accomplishment of his villainous design. At its center he had cleared a small space, and made it smooth and level, and cut a path—all carefully concealed from the observation of passers upon the river or its banks. With supremest confidence in him, and fearing nothing when he was near, Mespé already had met him here on several occasions, and so was familiar with the place.

It was here the last appointment was made. Mahagua was cautious as ever. He preceded Mespé by a considerable time, watching his opportunity to land upon the islet when no one was in view, and drawing his boat into the concealment of the bushes. She followed, obeying particular instructions delivered in advance, steering clear so long as any one was in sight, and pulling quickly in when all was free.

As she touched the shore Mahagua appeared, and, laying hold of the second boat, drew it from the water and laid it beside his own. It occurs not infrequently that fortune seems to favor the schemes of the wicked. So it was in this instance, for, although no eye witnessed the landing of either Mespé or Mahagua, no sooner was the boat of the former hidden, than around a neighboring point a fleet of barges came, some containing dignitaries of the kingdom on their way to the royal palace.

Mahagua, with seeming fondness, took his fair companion by the hand, and led her along the path toward the open space at the center of the islet. When there, he placed his arm, as though with affection, about her waist, and received the pretty head upon his shoulder. In this manner they proceeded until the lover's seat he had constructed was reached, and on this they sat, still continuing their warm caresses. Responding yet fervently to her endearing words, he loosened in his waistcloth a short, keen knife, preparing for the deed of blood. As her fair and innocent face looked up frankly and confidingly to his, even the soul that was in him, despite its thoroughly wicked nature, shrunk from the task of slaying her. With those soft eyes beaming love, and fixed tenderly upon his own, it was difficult to strike. He resorted to a stratagem to turn them from him while he dealt the one fierce and deadly blow. In pretended sport he loosened from her graceful neck a string of bright beads, worn with the womanly desire of appearing attractive in his sight. Then, as though by accident, he dropped it at her feet. With playful upbraiding she stooped to recover the ornament. The cruel hand of Mahagua sought his waist, and the gleam-

ing blade was on high. In another instant he plunged it deep into the back of the stooping and unsuspecting girl. A disconcerting movement upon her part spoiled the assassin's aim, intended for the heart, and so the stab was not immediately fatal.

Mespé felt the steel, and, springing up, for a moment was unable to comprehend the cause of the pang she experienced. As the murderer stood confronting her, in his hand the dripping instrument of crime, and preparing to repeat the stroke, she was bewildered. The fond heart refused almost to credit the sight. A dazed look entered her eyes, and finally the horrid truth, too patent to be denied, forced itself even upon her loving soul. Then a mighty fear possessed her, and one despairing shriek, laden with all the terror that filled her, pierced the air. Piteously she begged for life, and, with the fierce strength of utter desperation, caught the threatening arm, clinging to it tightly. So tenacious was the clasp that it required all the force of Mahagua, and a struggle of some duration, to shake it off.

“Oh, my love,” she pleaded, while striving with him, “what can this mean? Surely thou wilt not destroy me so cruelly, who have given thee my whole heart, and trusted so much to thee! What have I done to anger thee? Indeed have I been true in thought and act, loving thee with all my strength! Tell me what thou desirest, and oh, my love, it shall be granted! Spare me! Spare me!”

By the time these words of agony were spoken Mahagua had succeeded in casting her off, bleeding profusely from the wound in her back, and with fingers and arms terribly lacerated and cut by the keen edge of the knife, in her futile efforts to detain it. Then the

poor girl, in her fright almost losing reason and control, fell upon her knees, and, with incoherent utterance, continued her entreaties for mercy. He, however, was relentless. Deliberately he caught the bleeding hands firmly in his own, and pressed the despairing girl to earth. Then, placing a knee upon the tender bosom, he pinned her down, clutching the soft and glossy hair and drawing back the pretty head. In another instant the cruel knife swept forcibly across the shapely throat.

As the horrid deed was accomplished, and the body of the unfortunate Mespé was quivering in mortal agony, a harsh voice startled and interrupted Mahagua. "Well done!" it exclaimed. "Worthy, indeed, hast thou proven thyself of the dread master, Maqui, Prince of Demons."

Looking hastily up, he beheld at his side Khoplé, the sorcerer.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE TEMPLE OF THE DEVIL.

THE impatience of the murderer did not prevent him from adopting precautions, in addition to those already taken, to avoid the possibility of detection. He did not leave the island until night had fallen. Then, by means of strong withes, attaching heavy rocks to the body of his victim, he cast it into the bosom of the river, and, drawn by the weights, it sank swiftly to the bottom. He then took the boats, and, casting the one of Mespé adrift, scuttled and sank his own, reaching the bank by swimming. He made no delay, but, with

the heart in his possession, started once more for the abode of the sorcerer.

When Mahagua stood again before the low hut, Khoplé appeared immediately. The pair seemed now thoroughly to understand each other, and without the necessity of words. Signing to his companion to follow, the wizard led the way behind the cabin. There another path appeared which the hovel had hidden from view. Pursuing this, they came to a second opening, in the center of which stood a small, black temple. Its heavy doors swung noiselessly at the touch of the enchanter. Two hideous idols, crooked and deformed, flanked the entrance on either side, squatting low, and with head inclined and resting against a huge club grasped in both hands and lying across a shoulder. As Mahagua entered, all was dark within, except at the farther end, where a flame burned, lurid and feeble, disclosing by its somber light a great idol of fearful mien, sitting cross-legged upon an elevated platform. This image Mahagua supposed to be the effigy of Maqui, Prince of Demons.

No window or aperture of any kind admitted the glorious light of heaven into this gloomy interior, the very doors being doubled to guard against its entrance. A few moments, however, accustomed the eyes to the darkness of the place, and then all within was dimly discernible. The roof was low, supported by a few columns, thick and squat, and carved rudely with heads of demons and dragons, grinning and repulsive. There was no floor to this devil's temple but the naked earth. The walls and ceiling were black as ebony, seemingly begrimed with the smoke and filth of years. Immense and swelling spiders, dark and hideous, with many,

glowing eyes, spun tremendous webs between the pillars, along the sides, and across the ceiling. The place reeked with mold and dampness; and the air was so charged with odors, rank as those of the charnel-house, that Mahagua, on entering, was almost stifled. This last feature was explained by a number of human skulls and bones lying in confused heaps upon the ground. Most of these were small, and evidently those of children, showing the nature of the sacrifices offered up in honor of the demon by the wretch who worshiped, with horrid rites, at this infernal shrine.

Mahagua's attention was now drawn more particularly to the upper end of the temple. There the flame flickered fitfully in a deep and open brazier placed upon a pedestal; and it rose perpetually in front of this demonian altar. By day and by night Khoplé was its watchful guardian, feeding it with poisonous gums and resins. Close beside this ever-burning lamp stood the sacrificial stone of black marble, broad and smooth, and stained and spotted with the blood of many victims.

Closely scrutinizing the great idol sitting in state, Mahagua was impressed with the fact that its carving and workmanship were superior to the effigies of Buddha which the people had reared in their sanctuaries. The face was stern and repulsive, yet not without a certain malignant beauty. In each socket, for an eye glowed a diamond of immense size, emitting a baleful gleam. The beard and hair were cut in representation of long and slender serpents, writhing and intertwined. The hands were the cruel claws of the eagle, and in one, upraised, was tightly gripped a symbol of the universe. This grim and dreadful image, as though carved out of
 ¹ ebony, was black as night itself. During the few

moments that had been taken to observe these things the sorcerer was lying prostrate just within the doorway, anxiously expecting his companion to do the same. He, however, engaged in the contemplation of these marvelous things, paid little deference to the impatience of Khoplé. The latter at last reached up, and, taking the hand of Mahagua, pulled him to earth by an exertion of strength that was not to be resisted.

The wizard was silent for a time, but finally, in accents low and harsh, his voice was heard.

“Oh, Mighty Demon! Prince of all the Powers of Darkness!” he exclaimed, “pardon the unwitting irreverence of him whom I have brought to thy temple, and deign to listen with favor to the invocation of thy slave. He who now prostrates himself beside me is worthy to be thy servant, and hath so proven himself. He hath brought the offering of propitiation—the heart of the virgin Mespé, by him first won, and then, by his own hand, from her beating bosom torn.”

Rising to his feet, the sorcerer made sign to his companion to remain abased, and, reaching toward him, took the heart of the maiden, which, partially embalmed and wrapped in palm-leaves, had been concealed in the garments of Mahagua. This the enchanter laid upon the sacrificial stone, and, stooping, raised a slab, which before, in the darkness, had escaped the notice of his companion. The aperture led to a subterranean chamber, into which Khoplé descended. He was gone but a moment, returning with a small black box, which was laid upon the ground as the slab was replaced. Opening the lid, he brought forth a flask containing an ebon powder of large grain, and of pungent and disagreeable odor. Of this he poured some in a continu-

ous stream, forming a wide circle about the stone of sacrifice. More was distributed, in the same manner, in the form of a sweeping curve, directly in front of the great idol. All of these proceedings had been accompanied by weird movements and mumbled incantations.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE SHADOW OF THE DEMON.

WHEN the mystic ring and curve were drawn, and the wicked ritual had proceeded thus far, Khoplé dashed his hand into the heated brazier, and seemed to grasp, unscathed, a portion of the flame. With this he touched first the powder that lay in a half circle immediately before the idol, and next that which circumscribed the sacrificial stone. To both the fire took instantaneously, but it spread slowly and flickered feebly for a time. As it gained in strength its characteristics developed. The color was deepest purple, and, while it lit with somber light the spaces it encompassed yet it cast no illumination into the darkness beyond.

Meanwhile the sorcerer had taken his position beside the stone, and within the burning ring that inclosed it, furiously gesticulating, and moving excitedly, as though to the measure of unearthly music, in some wild, unholy dance. His voice was raised aloud, hoarse and grating, in a mystic chant, the words whereof were unintelligible to Mahagua. As the lurid, quivering blaze sprung up from the consuming drugs, the place

was filled with vapor, and the odor grew stronger of corruption and decay.

It must have been an hour since the twain had entered the temple, of which time much had been consumed by these wicked ceremonials, when the wizard stopped suddenly, and, with tones now elevated to a pitch higher and more unearthly, seized the heart of Mespé, as it lay upon the stone, and cast it into the brazier. The heart of the poor virgin burst instantly into flame, which shot up pale-green, but shedding little radiance. As this new fire leaped forth, the wizard grew with every moment more excited, chanting fiercely, and circling with furious effort about the sacrificial marble. The muscles of his face were drawn by excitation into great knobs, and continued and excessive labor brought out the perspiration in beads upon his forehead.

At this stage Mahagua perceived the change taking place within the flickering curve drawn before the idol. Closer examination revealed a vapor gathering about the figure of the demon, and, as he gazed intently, it grew more dense and dark. In a few moments it hung so thick and black that it veiled the image, and stood, reaching almost to the roof, like a pillar of night. As he lay still, prone, he felt a rushing over him, and throughout the temple he heard the mighty rustling of a multitude of wings.

Now the flame in the brazier commenced to lose its force, and the blazing rings died down, while through the sable cloud that enwrapped the ebon image played gleams like the flashing of somber lightnings. This seemed to Khoplé the expected sign, and, upon its appearance, he ceased his incantations and fell prostrate before the shadow.

From the center of the profound obscurity speech came forth, deep and powerful, like the voice of great torrents or the clamor of mighty cataracts. At the sound the rustling wings were silent, the temple seemed bursting, and the very air was affrighted.

"I am here," the voice exclaimed, "summoned by thine invocation from the Halls of Darkness. It has pleased me to approve the sacrifice of him who comes to swear his fealty, and I accept him into the number of my servants. Let him approach and make the solemn pledge."

At this command the sorcerer rose, and, bowing low, proceeded to obey. Mahagua was led within the circle of fire, which smoldered yet about the stone. There he stood, with lowered head, in the immediate presence of the awful shade.

"Thou art Mahagua," again the shadow spoke. "Driven by consuming hate, thou seekest the countenance of Maqui, Prince of Demons, in thy quest for vengeance. The conditions upon which thou art permitted to hope for aid have been made known to thee. Art thou content to enter into the compact?"

"Mighty Spirit," Mahagua answered, "I am aware that, unaided, I can never avenge the wrongs imposed upon me, and I am willing to pay the price, however fearful, that will secure the gratification of my furious passion. The pains thou hast it in power to inflict can be no more than the agony that already fills my soul. Nevertheless, surrendry on my part should be met by some assurance upon thine."

"We have none to accord," the voice responded. "Our purpose is to break the spell that guards Cambodia, and perchance thou mayest be the instrument of

its accomplishment. Yet thou canst have no promise. If in thy heart still lingers the hope of combating, unaided, the powers of Pra-Enn, return to the futile efforts. Be advised, however, that in thy favor the Prince of Demons will respond to no second invocation."

Even at this supreme moment Mahagua, though he had come prepared for compliance, dreading treachery, hesitated to commit himself so entirely to the power of the Evil One. While the matter was thus in mental debate, the Spirit grew impatient. The shadow encompassing the idol was becoming thinner, and the tones that now came forth were less strong.

"Speak!" the fiend said. "I am departing for the Halls of Darkness, and thou art losing an occasion that will never return."

Mahagua was startled by what he saw and heard. At the moment a bitter recollection of the late affray, and its result of humiliation, rushed through his mind, and the remembrance swept reluctance away.

"Stay, mighty Prince of Demons!" he exclaimed. "It is done. Upon any terms I swear allegiance."

Again the shadow grew dark and the voice stronger. "Let the parchment be produced," it said.

The sorcerer once more had recourse to the box that had come from the crypt, drawing forth a scroll prepared from the skin of a deadly serpent, and upon which, in crimsoned letters, were engrossed the words of the covenant. With this in hand, and bowing low, before the shade the wizard stood.

"Let it be read," commanded the Spirit of Darkness. Now from the roll a sullen light sprung up, which played about it, and by the low glare Khoplé

gave voice to what was written. Behind him the suspicious Mahagua took position, following the text, and thus the compact ran :

“ Through the grace of Maqui, Prince of Demons, Mahagua, son of the mandarin Luang, hath been admitted under the dominion of the Powers of Evil.

“ He hath become the servitor of the demons.

“ He hath renounced all fealty to the angels and to every god, and to all the spirits whose power is arrayed against that of his masters.

“ He hath rejected and repudiated the good-will and intervention of the angels and gods, and of all the spirits of light.

“ He hath solemnly renounced all of merit which, in former states of being, he may have acquired, and reclaimed all canceled demerits.

“ He hath bound himself in all future, until the coming and extinction of the last of all the Buddhas, to think no thought and perform no act of virtue.

“ He hath abandoned, until that time, all hope or right of advancement upon the path of self-purification and amendment, and agreed that, until then, for him the wheel of change shall not revolve.

“ He hath made himself the last of all beings to enter upon the blessings of Nirvana.

“ He scorns and rejects Gautama and his doctrines, and to his merit renounces every claim.

“ He scorns and rejects the doctrines and merits of all the Buddhas.

“ He reviles and heaps curses upon the name and memory of Gautama.

“ He reviles and heaps curses upon the names and memory of all the Buddhas.

“ He reviles and heaps curses upon the angels and gods, and all the spirits of good.

“ He honors and adores the demons.

“ He hath, in advance, as was required, sanctioned this solemn compact by the sacrifice of the virgin Mespé.

“ He hath verified it by signing the parchment with his blood.”

Such were the stipulations of the engagement ; yet Mahagua did not hesitate. With a dagger, as Khoplé directed, he pricked his arm deeply, and with the flowing blood affixed his signature.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE ISLE OF DEMONS.

HAVING bound himself thus solemnly to the demon, Mahagua was directed to repair at once, with Khoplé, to the Hall of Darkness. Much of his patrimony was yet unspent. The sorcerer announced that a junk and cargo must now be purchased. The abode of the fiend lay in the heart of the Eastern oceans, thousands of uzemas away, and it was the will of the master that by ship the intervening space should be traversed. The crew was to be engaged under pretense of a voyage to Japan.

When the pair had reached the capital, Mahagua was alarmed lest the hideousness of his companion should attract attention. He was astonished, however, that the latter received no special notice. The sorcerer divined his thoughts.

“It excites thy wonder,” he said, “that as we pass no one stops upon the streets to stare. Know that although I may not escape the deformities Nature has given me, yet I am able to blind the eyes of men, so that my form appears in shape as I desire. It is thus the curiosity and repugnance of the people are avoided.”

There was no difficulty in securing a fitting vessel, with its complement of sailors. A suitable freight was also laden, and the junk set sail. Favoring winds and a strong current bore it speedily to the mouth of the Mekong, and it stood out immediately for the sea. From this point northward, almost ever in sight of land, the way was held until the island of Hainan was passed, where they bore off to avoid the pirates swarming upon the Chinese coast. Soon the latitude of Formosa was attained, when, for the first time, there was deviation from the route to Japan. The ship suddenly altered its course and turned its prow fairly toward the east. Mahagua observed the change, and marveled that the sailors had not done the same. Khoplé explained, informing him that the helmsman and his comrades were under a spell, believing they still maintained the original direction.

In this new track the voyage continued for many days, until even the men were astonished that the harbor was not reached. No storm or mischance of any kind befell them, until at last a hazy thread indicated land. As they advanced, the line grew heavier and darker, and soon the land itself was clearly discernible. What had been seen at first was the top of a mountain-range, lying far inland, and seeming to tower higher than the loftiest of the Himalayas. Such was the altitude of these stupendous peaks that, though the winds

were favoring and the speed of the junk was good, days elapsed before the lower shore itself was visible. Even these startling contrasts between this coast and that of Japan did not break the spell that lay upon the crew.

At some distance from the beach the anchor was cast. Now the sorcerer declared that, as an offering of propitiation to the demons, the vessel, with its men and cargo, must be sacrificed. Mahagua cared nothing for the lives of the sailors, but he opposed the destruction of his property, and the loss of what appeared to be the sole dependence for returning to Cambodia. Khoplé, however, was inexorable, explaining that, at proper time, the master would supply the means of recrossing the waters.

When the ship came to rest, evening had already fallen. The sinking sun was veiled by high-heaped clouds that were white and fleecy, and his expiring radiance touched them with gold and crimson, and lined them with silver. The expanse of ocean was quiet, save the rippling wavelets that ran before the sportful winds. To the east a graceful shore-line lay, with those towering mountains behind, that seemed of darkest blue, and stood out clear against a lighter sky. As though under a benison, all nature seemed reposing. The soothing influence fell upon the sailors, and they lay about the decks in blissful idleness, little dreaming of the catastrophe of which this peaceful hour was the eve.

CHAPTER XLVII.

PREPARING FOR THE SACRIFICE.

WHEN the day was gone, the moon, with its softer light, succeeded to the brighter sun. So lovely was the night that the men were loath to retire, and it was late before the deck was surrendered to the watch. At last, however, except the few on duty, officers and men were wrapped in peaceful slumber. Now, among the sleeping sailors Khoplé softly crept, and, blowing gently upon the face of each, cast them all into a profound stupor.

When so much was accomplished, the enchanter turned his attention to those on duty above. Selecting for the object of his first assault the one who was at the moment in the position most convenient for his purpose, toward him the wizard moved some steps, and then began to make his mystic passes. The sailor was leaning carelessly over the ship's side, and scarcely had more than two or three of these necromantic gestures been delivered before, as if dead, he fell heavily to the deck. The sorcerer experienced no difficulty in similarly disposing of a second; but the third and last had heard the fall of one companion, and witnessed the fate of the other, and was therefore not to be approached by stealth.

The man had been transfixed and speechless with horror; but, seeing the assassin advance, his tongue was loosened, and he shouted with all his force to alarm the crew. The call was unheeded, for they to whom it was addressed were powerless to assist. Finding his outcry without response, his fear increased, and, casting down his weapon, he fled for life.

The first impulse of the flying wretch led him to the mast, up which he clambered with agility. His enemy, however, was close upon him, when, seizing a rope that hung from above, he swung himself far out upon the deck. In an instant the cord returned, and Khoplé, grasping it, plunged after. In despair, and as a last resource, the fugitive ran for the sword he had discarded, presenting it full upon his terrible assailant. His eyes, however, rested upon those of the latter, lit as these were with fury until they blazed in the pale light of the moon, and he quailed before their demoniac expression. More affrighted than ever, the sailor turned again in flight, and, disheartened utterly, precipitated himself into the sea.

Khoplé, determined that this one should not escape the cruel fate of his comrades, still pursued, and leaping into the water, he followed in the wake. The fleeing man was speedily overtaken, and a heavy hand was upon him. With the fierce energy of despair he grappled his assailant, but to no purpose, for his head was pressed beneath the surface with irresistible force, and held until he himself was unconscious.

Mahagua, witnessing this terrified flight and implacable pursuit, had no doubt but that the sorcerer at the outset might have overtaken and destroyed his victim, but had prolonged the suffering to gratify his cruel instincts. The body was drawn aboard, its quiverings showing that life was not extinct. It was then deposited in the hold alongside the others that lay already there, still insensible. The two seamen of the watch that had fallen before the chase of their comrade had begun were likewise put below, so that now the wicked associates were alone upon the decks.

Khoplé peered into the dark hatchway, and the breathing of the doomed came up heavy and stertorous. Some mystic ceremony was now performed at the opening, and sounds came up indicating the returning consciousness of the men below. Some were heard to rise, and others spoke, questioning their fellows.

Here was the signal for which the sorcerer waited. As the voices became audible, he hastily arose and fastened the hatches, so that none of his victims might escape. Mahagua, at a loss to comprehend entirely the conduct of his companion, demanded an explanation.

"Why," he asked, "hast thou taken such pains in the work of destroying these wretches? Why deprive them of sense only to restore it again?"

"I have told thee," was the answer, "that this vessel, with its crew and cargo, is set as an offering of propitiation to the demons upon whose shores we are about to disembark. The sacrifice must be consumed by fire, becoming more grateful to our masters when accompanied by the groans and shrieks of dying men. These I made helpless that they might be put beyond power of resistance or escape, and they were revived to meet their doom aroused and fully alive to the torture of the flame."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE ISLE OF DEMONS AND THE SABLE MOUNTAINS.

As a part of the cargo was a quantity of earth-oils from the wells of Yananhoong, and much of this was now scattered about the decks and thrown into the sails

and rigging. Some of the naphtha ran below, through numerous holes Khoplé had cut for the admission of air to the men beneath, that their misery might be prolonged.

When all was ready fire was put. The flames spread with rapidity, folding the vessel, its spars and apparel, as though in a single mighty blaze. The imprisoned wretches saw the glare of conflagration, and the full comprehension of their frightful situation burst upon them. Their voices were raised in despairing cries that were heard above the fury of the burning. The moment the ship was well alight Mahagua and his associate had taken a boat, pulling vigorously to shore.

Here was the Island of Demons. Before them, far inland, were the Sable Mountains, in whose heart the Halls of Darkness lay. Such was the altitude of this stupendous chain, that its high peaks seemed towering immediately above, blotting out the sky, and the base itself appeared as though at no great distance. When, however, the voyagers undertook to reach the range, to the surprise of Mahagua, days were consumed in the journey. The road lay through a desolate and arid waste of blackest sands, broken in places by massive rocks like ebony. No vegetation of any kind covered the dark desert, and no stream marked the dreary expanse. The air was without moisture, and no breezes swept away or relieved the stifling heat. The passage was one of labor and difficulty.

The base of the mountains was reached at last. Their face was steep, and rising so high that Mahagua, looking up, was unable to distinguish the brow. The precipice seemed by distance blended into the heavens themselves, and its enormous bulk was like the night.

Before Khoplé and his companion was now a mighty flight of steps leading up through a great opening, seemingly to the very core of this immensity of rock. To Mahagua it appeared, indeed, the broad entrance-way to the Empire of Darkness. Again, for enlightenment, he turned to the sorcerer.

“Here we abide,” the latter responded to his question, “until the rising of to-morrow’s sun. We must ascend the sweeping stairs, and the toilsome task will consume a day and a night. From the moment the mounting is begun until the distant top be attained no rest or stop is possible. Exhausted by travel, we can not now attempt this tremendous labor. The repose of the coming night must give us strength.”

Mahagua, greatly fatigued, accepted this wise decision. Casting himself upon the earth, he was too wearied for immediate sleep, and so gave his attention more closely to the surroundings. The aperture through which the flight went up was so wide that the human vision scarcely reached from side to side, and its height was only insignificant by comparison with the altitude of the mountains themselves. The broad space was broken, at regular intervals, by masses of native rock, reaching, like monster rough-hewn pillars, from bottom to top. Now Mahagua noticed, what before had escaped him, the flitting of countless shades that swarmed into and out of the darkness. They were vague and indefinite, so as to be scarcely discernible.

He called the attention of the sorcerer to them, demanding an explanation.

“These,” Khoplé responded, “are the fiends of the earth, the air, and of the sea, coming to pay homage to

the prince, or departing to their haunts, or else bearing to and fro the commands of the master."

As he watched these spirits rushing by in shadowy torrents, Mahagua marveled at their number.

"Truly," he said, "the demons must be beyond all computation!"

"Truly so!" the sorcerer replied. "They fill the atmosphere that is about us, the water that flows in every stream or river, or washes the shores of every nation. They are more numerous than men, with birds, beasts, reptiles, and insects all combined. Were the sum of every grain of sand and the total of every drop of water joined together, the result would not exceed their mighty aggregate."

The day was drawing rapidly to its close, and a vapor now began escaping from the mountain. It was thin at first, and almost imperceptible, but grew gradually thicker and more dark. Again Mahagua questioned his associate.

"The place we are about to enter," Khoplé made answer, "is the Palace of Darkness. Thence come, as the sun goes down, the shades of night, spreading themselves over earth and covering all from sight. Within the Palace of Light Pra-Enn is enthroned, commanding the sun and moon and all that is luminous. With the morning his gates are cast open, and the light goes forth, driving the shadows back into the heart of the mountain. Then, in triumphal march, the day-orb sweeps across the firmament, typical of the glory and power of its master, the Angel-king.

"Ages ago, between Pra-Enn and his angels and Maqui, with all the devils, a bitter conflict raged for the supremacy of the universe. The struggle was uncer-

tain, though somewhat to the advantage of the celestial host. Then a covenant was made, and the dominion for which they warred was divided between the contending powers. Each controls the destinies of men according as they themselves may incline to vice or virtue. Time was likewise partitioned into hours of sunshine and hours of obscurity. During the period assigned the demons the darkness prevails, while the spirits of heaven flood the universe with light. As, however, Pra-Enn displayed superiority of power, in token thereof even the blackness of night is at times tempered, and the pale moon appears in the heavens."

Mahagua listened to this explanation with profound interest. He watched more closely the sable vapor now emerging in great unbroken mass. So dense and thick it rushed forth that it seemed as though the Sable Mountains themselves were melting and spreading over creation's face.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE EBON STAIRS.

THE excitement of the day just closed did not prevent Mahagua from slumbering profoundly. When he awoke, the dominion of the light was re-established, and the sun was well above the horizon. He found Khoplé awake, and the ascent of the ebon stairs began. They had not proceeded far before pitchy darkness enveloped them, and only by the sound of each other's footfalls were they able to keep together.

They had climbed for many hours, and Mahagua was exceedingly weary. He longed for rest, but found it impossible to stop. Some power kept his faltering limbs in motion, pushing him ever upward. The slow minutes dragged along, each adding to the fatigue that pressed upon him. His sufferings were intense. Every muscle was rent with pain, and his aching members were ready to succumb. Nevertheless, he was forced to continue his laborious way. At last he began to hope that the end was drawing near. With panting breath and greatest difficulty he addressed Khoplé.

"I am almost overcome," he said. "Surely this toil will not endure much longer?"

This was not the first ascent the sorcerer had made, and he was consequently better informed than his companion.

"Several times have I performed this wearisome journey," he answered, "and I have counted every stair of the mighty flight. More than twenty thousand steps there are, and as yet we have not surmounted one half the number."

As he received this disheartening intelligence Mahagua groaned aloud.

"The task is too great," he exclaimed; "I shall never accomplish it."

"Although the pain and misery are intense," was the reply, "the master will give thee strength until the long acclivity is conquered. Do thy sufferings, however, bring regret at the execution of the compact?"

"Not at all," Mahagua hastily made answer. "If this distress but leads to the accomplishment of my revenge, it is willingly encountered. It was of physical

endurance alone that I was doubtful, fearing the human frame could not resist such toil."

"Be thou then contented," said Khoplé, "for the master will hold thee up."

To increase Mahagua's anguish, the rock of which the steps were roughly hewn had worn the covering from each foot, and the naked soles, thus exposed, were blistered and made sore. Then they were raw, and bled profusely, and as he slowly ascended, his print was left behind in blood. Ankles and leg-joints, and feet themselves, were swollen beyond all proportion. The thongs that had bound his sandals were cutting into the flesh, causing intense agony, yet he could not stop or bend to loosen the tightened strings.

At last every stair of the long flight was accomplished, and Khoplé and Mahagua stood at the top, panting, and racked with the torment of excessive fatigue. Hardly had the top been reached ere Mahagua fell to the floor of the black space in which he was. As he lay incapable of movement, the sorcerer whispered in his ear :

"It is well for thee," he said, "that thy courage and endurance have withstood the ordeal to which they have been subjected. It is the first of those to which the master has decreed that thou shouldst be submitted before entering to his presence. Sooner or later the dreadful penalty of the compact must be paid, but boldness and resolution may, perchance, postpone the evil day until thine enemies be destroyed."

Mahagua had forced himself, by a strong effort, to attend to these words ; but, at their conclusion, he could do no more. Upon the rocky floor he lay, silent and exhausted. Then, overcome by weariness and suffering, he sank into a state of insensibility.

CHAPTER L.

ACROSS THE HALL OF DARKNESS.

THE sorcerer did not long suffer his companion to remain in this broken and helpless condition. Drawing from the folds of his waistcloth a joint of bamboo, he touched a mystic liquid to the lips of the unconscious man. The effect was marvelous and instantaneous. Mahagua roused from stupor, and his pain and soreness were gone. The bleeding feet were likewise moistened with the healing liquor, and every trace of injury disappeared. Now he was strong and vigorous as ever, but still could distinguish nothing in the obscurity in which he was immersed. This inability the sorcerer remedied, applying an ointment; and at once the eyes were cleared and Mahagua saw perfectly through the darkened space.

He now cast his curious glances about him, observing the character of his surroundings. Down the long stairway, in distance seeming almost infinite, the great opening appeared, as a merest speck of light.

He found himself in a vast space, excavated from off the solid heart of the mountain. Its size and shape his vision was unable to discern. Immediately above him, beyond sight, one of the great black walls arose. From the top of the entrance, far as the eye could go, this tall side was pierced by innumerable arched apertures, in long, continuous rows, that appeared to be the doorways to lesser halls extending into the body of the dark rock.

Through the great chamber, in groups and colonnades, a vast number of immense and massive pillars

stood. They sprung from heavy bases upon the floor, and lost themselves in obscurity above. Despite their actual magnitude, their length was such that these columns seemed slender, and gave to the area the appearance of a somber and gloomy forest. Myriads of beings flitted in all directions through the interminable maze. They were of every size, but all misshapen and repulsive. These were the spirits of evil that dwelt within this abode of darkness.

A huge creature now appeared in the distance, coming directly toward them. Its body was hairy, and surmounted by a hump, like that of a dromedary; and upon wide and leathery wings, like a monster bat, it swept along. The aspect of the head and features, as it approached, greatly augmented its hideousness. The countenance was that of humanity, but horribly exaggerated and distorted.

It stayed its flight directly in front of the companions; and as it did so Mahagua looked toward his associate inquiringly.

"This being," said the sorcerer, "is sent to bear us to the presence of the master. The swiftness of its flight is such that the length of this vast chamber will be traversed in less time than thou, in the Cambodian capital, couldst walk from the Royal Landing-place, upon the Mekong, to the 'Gate of Armies.' And yet from end to end this mighty hall is ten uzemas."

"But where shall we find the Prince of Demons?" Mahagua demanded.

"His throne," was the response, "lies at the upper end of this Place of Darkness."

"For what," he asked again, "is this wilderness of columns?"

“This great hall,” the sorcerer answered, “is, as I have already declared, ten uzemas in length ; it is eight in width. These pillars, seeming so slight, are, in fact, each broader than the Temple of Yuen ; and their office is to prop up the mountain-top, which roofs the space.”

By this time the thing that was to transport them began to show signs of impatience, and Khoplé deemed it prudent to mount without further delay. In a moment both were sitting firmly upon its back. They tangled their feet and clenched their hands into the long and shaggy coat, and the leathery wings were unfolded.

At first the flight was slow, but every instant increased the speed, until at length the progress was that of a flash. The still air as they went seemed passing like a whirlwind, and the columns flew by so rapidly as to be almost undistinguishable. The grip of Mahagua was of necessity so strong that the wiry hair caused him misery, and even cut into the flesh of his fingers.

Now the purpose of the monster seemed to be to unseat those by whom he was bestridden. Changing its course suddenly, and at every moment, it darted obliquely to the right, and again to the left, rendering the positions upon its back more painful and precarious. This danger and distress, instead of terrifying, infuriated Mahagua. He vented his spleen upon the creature that bore him, digging his heels viciously into its flanks. It seemed not insensible to suffering, for, with every sounding thump, it groaned in agony. Nevertheless, the dangerous eccentricities of its flight were not discontinued ; and the vengeful rider redoubled his exertions, deriving satisfaction from the moans his kicks elicited.

CHAPTER LI.

THE THRONE OF MAQUI.

AT last, much to the satisfaction of Mahagua, the journey across the Hall of Darkness was ended. He had suffered intensely, and was aggrieved at the imposition of what he considered needless torture. Conversation had been impossible during the course of the swift and perilous flight ; but now he complained to his comrade.

“Those who are slaves to the demons,” the sorcerer replied, “are doomed to torment, even before the pits receive them. The pain and hazard of this grievous ride, however, had a special purpose. It was the second ordeal upon thy courage and endurance.”

Strange things were now before Mahagua, and occurrences incomprehensible were transpiring. He and his companion were in close view of the high wall forming the extremity of the immense area. As Khoplé was speaking, the dark face began to tremble, and then it wavered more violently. In another instant it melted away, disclosing an emptiness behind, black and inscrutable. A somber vapor issued forth, and, like a heavy curtain, spread across its front. After a time this shadowy veil was riven at its center, and rolled aside on either hand. As this happened a marvelous spectacle appeared. A tall, dark platform of several stages was disclosed. At its top, the space was broad ; and below, three successive and widening levels gave it a pyramidal form.

At the summit, raised upon an ebon throne of state, and behind it the darkness of the void, alone a figure

sat. It bore the shape and semblance of man, but immense, awe-inspiring, and terrific. The features were massive and regular, in faultless proportion with the magnitude of the shape. The beauty, however, was baleful. Malice infinite was stamped upon every lineament, while the great eyes shone with fire, consuming in its fierceness.

Upon the plane immediately below five others were instated. Each was in appearance comely and terrific, inferior only to him who rested above in solitary grandeur. Upon the lower stages, in succession, were other forms, seeming, upon each floor, to increase in numbers but diminish in importance as they receded from the Mighty One.

In myriads, upon the rocky pavement about the base of the platform, and as far out as the eye could reach; the lesser subjects of the demonian realm lay prostrate. They were black as night, and all hideous and deformed.

In respectful adoration, Khoplé had fallen upon his face; but Mahagua, filled with wondering admiration, did not follow his example, but stood gazing upon these marvelous things.

The Prince of Demons it was, sitting over all. His eyes, whose terrible glance none could endure, were fixed on space. The vast throng of evil spirits was wrapped in profoundest silence. Slowly, then, the lips of the figure stirred; and, like the roll of ten thousand thunders, a voice was heard. It echoed through the vast expanse, as though each trembling pillar were repeating the awful words. As it spoke, the shapes enthroned upon the lower levels rose and bowed low toward the master, resuming their seats only when the sounds had died away.

“Rash mortal!” the Arch-Fiend said, addressing Mahagua, “into the Hall of Darkness thou hast ventured, and up to the very feet of the Power of Evil—such is the unbounded presumption with which the thirst for vengeance hath filled thee. Thou wert mad with hate to dream that the Potentates of Darkness would concern themselves in thy quarrel. Now shalt thou endure the penalty of thine audacity and be cast into the torment.”

Mahagua was astounded. The character of this reception, so different from what he was expecting, cast him for some moments into dumbness and confusion. Soon, however, the purport of the language forced itself upon his comprehension, and he was enraged at the treachery of Maqui. The loss of all prospect of revenge filled him with despair, but increased his fury. His was not a nature to submit tamely to such usage, from whatever hands it came. Filled with wrath, and in utter disregard of the awe-inspiring presence, he gave vent to the bitterness of his soul.

“Vile Devil!” he exclaimed, “thou art a liar and a deceiver! If I am here, it is at thy command, and in thy service, and under guarantees, shamelessly set at naught! Do now thy worst: I scorn and defy thee! Though thou mayest rend me with enduring agony, yet, under all, shall I be the triumphant one! Thy fiercest torture will not break this spirit, or quench the loathing with which it is filled toward thee!”

As this invective was uttered, through the startled space swept a murmur deep and prolonged. The myriad demons had heard the words of scorn and defiance, and each gave forth a stifled cry of horror.

Never before, during all the cycles of being, had the mighty Prince of Evil been bearded thus.

Again the lips of the Great One moved, and again the place was filled with reverberation. The lesser potentates rose once more, and stood bowed before the high throne.

“A thousandfold,” the master said, “thou hast augmented the intensity of thy torment. In naught hast thou been deceived. Within the dark temple of the Cambodian jungle all pledges were denied thee; and, without them, thou didst deliver thyself into our power. We have no will to aid thee against the Queen Anirah, and shall not delay the doom thou didst thyself invite.”

CHAPTER LII.

THE DEFIANCE.

MAHAGUA was still undaunted. The consciousness of impotence but increased his fury. His rage choked him, for a time preventing utterance. He was burning, however, to fling to the demon a fiercer defiance, and, stepping forward, he spat toward him with all his force.

As this was done, the great brows knitted, the lips compressed, and a dark scowl settled upon the hitherto impassive countenance. At these signs of the master's anger the concourse of demons shuddered, and even the potentates upon the platforms fell prostrate and trembled. The very rocks gave signs of fear, and the forest of columns was in tremor.

The terrible eyes of Maqui, that had been fixed upon space, now sank down slowly upon Mahagua. Despite the fury of the latter, he was as though petrified by the spectacle of that frowning face, and the blazing orbs scorched him as with consuming fire. His frame shrank under the withering influence, and every nerve and fiber seemed about to crack and fly with extremity of agony. Nevertheless, the indomitable will was unbroken, and his soul was not appalled.

For not more than a single second the terrific glance rested upon him ; but that moment was a century of pain. Slowly the eyes lifted, and the awful brow relaxed. The demons that thronged the space seemed infinitely relieved ; and Mahagua was free from torture.

Again spoke the Evil One.

“During an instant only,” he said, “thou hast been in torment. What thou hast endured is in the intensity of anguish but a millesimal of that which is to be thy lasting portion. Doubtless thy spirit is now less proud, and thou thinkest rather of imploring mercy than of defying our rage ?”

“Never !” Mahagua fiercely exclaimed. “All thou mayest do can but increase my hate and loathing for thee. I defy again, and spit upon thy power. Although the slightest word of submission would release me from the compact, never would that word be spoken. Whatever be the duration of thy dominion over me, and whatever cruelty thou mayest exert, it shall, through all, be met by an unshaken courage, for ever defiant.”

“It is our will,” the demon answered, “that the sentence be postponed.”

As the last words were uttered the curtain of vapor rolled back to its place, and the high pyramidal throne

was hidden from view. The throng of fiends that cumbered the floor with loud rustling rose into the air, and, flying to every quarter, vanished from sight. Silence reigned throughout the mighty chamber, and Khoplé and Mahagua seemed to be alone.

CHAPTER LIII.

AROUND THE HALL OF DARKNESS.

No occurrence, since the day Mahagua had first encountered the sorcerer, had excited the wonder of the former as that which had just transpired. He was eager for explanations, and, when sufficiently composed, he appealed at once to Khoplé.

“What is the meaning of all this?” he demanded. “Why these actions on the part of the Prince of Demons?”

The sorcerer had been awed by the last exhibition of boldness and resolution on the part of his associate. Devoid of fear toward all else, natural or supernatural, the wizard, nevertheless, dreaded the anger of his master. He had, therefore, been horrified by the conduct of Mahagua, reviling the Mighty One and defying his power. Such daring was beyond his comprehension; and he who had evinced it advanced immeasurably in his estimation. The response was, therefore, marked with utmost respect.

“Doubtless,” he answered, “what thou didst endure was the last ordeal through which it was decreed that thou shouldst pass. Never could I conceive that

human creature might withstand the terrific glance. Bold I am ; but the master's wrath I could not confront. Truly, thou art most wonderful of men ; and, for thee, there must be in store some task, the most difficult and hazardous of all which to human agency may be confided."

Mahagua's curiosity was not satisfied, and his questions continued.

"For what," he asked, "were these successive platforms reared, one above the other ; and who were they that sat below the topmost throne ?"

"The Spirits of Evil are of many kinds and differing natures," Khoplé made response. "They stand first divided into five subordinate realms, over which five inferior princes reign. These were the potentates that sat next in dignity below Maqui, Lord of All.

"These lesser dominions are of the air ; the sea, or open waters ; the streams and inland lakes ; the surface of the land ; and of the caves and subterranean places. Each has its subdivisions, over which, in turn, are rulers of various degrees of power. These latter, according to rank, sat upon the lower planes. All that were upon the triple platform constitute the Court of the Master, and are summoned to attend him when sitting in formal state."

At this moment a rushing sound was heard, and Mahagua beheld a monster similar to the one that had borne him across the Hall of Darkness. As it reached the spot where the twain were standing it folded its leathery wings and rested, as though awaiting their pleasure. Mahagua now inquired the name of the monster, and whence it came.

"It is a kyauck ; one of those beings," the sorcerer

answered, "that inhabit the voids beneath the universe. There, by restless and uncontrollable instinct, they are driven through space in aimless and perpetual roamings. In the endless chain of existence, they are but a step in advance of the sufferers immersed in the torments of Hell. They are inferior, in the scale of being, to the beasts, the birds, the reptiles, and fishes, and to everything upon earth that is animate; and they remain still subject to the demons."

"Why is the creature here?" Mahagua asked again.

"It awaits our pleasure," the wizard made reply, "to transport us wherever we may desire."

"And are we then permitted," Mahagua inquired, "to explore the space in which we are?"

"Assuredly!" Khoplé responded. "If it is thy wish, we shall make the circle of its walls, and visit the hells that honeycomb the heart of the mountains."

The proposal was eagerly accepted; and, in a moment, the companions were upon the back of the kyauck. The sorcerer seemed master of its movements; and to be familiar with the immense hall and all its parts. At his command, the monster sped away, sweeping along the black surface of the rock. The flight was swift; but yet Mahagua could observe the entrances to the lateral chambers.

The entire circuit was accomplished, and the kyauck now swerved upward toward the extended roof. When the mighty dome that spanned the depth was near, Mahagua saw the rough ceiling swarming with beings seemingly human. They were suspended in air, and toiled in countless numbers upon the concave. Some labored in detaching great blocks, while others, under enormous loads, bore away the massive fragments toward certain

ones of the tall pillars reaching from below. The columns to which they plied seemed hollow, and into the cavities the disrupted rock was cast, falling into profundity with crashing noise.

Here, at Mahagua's instance, a pause was made, while, full of interest, he silently observed the sufferers. Their forms were bent and broken by long and unceasing effort. Every countenance was haggard and wretched, and traced deep with lines of misery and excessive fatigue. Muteness hung heavy and oppressive about this place of sore distress.

"What beings are these," Mahagua asked, "and why do they labor thus painfully?"

"They are expiating sin," the sorcerer made reply. "Their condemnation is to a period of unceasing toil almost eternal. The accumulated weariness of centuries oppresses them, for, despite excessive lassitude, a power impels them ever to continued exertion. What for a short time thou didst endure upon the ebon stairs, these have borne during slow-moving millenniums, and still must bear during others to come."

Again Mahagua was silent for a time, contemplating the forms and features of these condemned, upon which anguish had so deeply left its mark.

"Why," he again inquired, "is the fractured rock discharged into these pillars, and whither does it fall?"

"Out of the multitude of columns," responded Khoplé, "supporting the mighty roof, some are hollow. Their long cavities reach down through earth itself to the voids beneath; and along the line of the excavations the fragments fall into emptiness below."

CHAPTER LIV.

THE CHAMBERS OF TORMENT.

MAHAGUA, satisfied in this locality, asked to proceed farther in the journey of exploration. He was curious to inspect the lateral halls, reaching into the body of the mountain. The kyauck, accordingly, bore the companions toward the nearest of the number. During the flight many questions were propounded to the sorcerer. They touched upon the nature of the places about to be visited.

“They are the ‘Chambers of Torment,’” was the answer; “innumerable hells, to which are consigned those who expiate the crimes of preceding states of existence. Such is the increasing multitude of the damned that all these millions of galleries of torture are insufficient to confine them. Therefore it is that so many labor at the roof, extending the immensity of the space, and multiplying its abodes of agony. In each of these infernal halls a different suffering is imposed, proportioned to the gravity of the offenses of which the occupants are guilty.”

The nearest of these apartments of misery was soon attained. The wide portal was passed, and they stood within its woful precincts. Before them, farther than the eye could reach, the gloomy prison stretched, low and broad, in dismal and unbroken vista. The whole of the somber expanse swarmed with humans, rushing at full speed, and with shrinking forms, hither and thither, aimlessly and perpetually.

Mahagua, noticing these wretches more particularly, observed that every movement betokened excessive

fright. They were flitting by with headlong haste ; and upon every countenance was graven an expression of indescribable horror.

“Wherefore,” Mahagua asked, “do these afflicted beings run so ceaselessly about ?”

“Their torment,” Khoplé answered, “is distracting terror. A consuming and ever-augmenting fear possesses them. Like their fellows throughout these places of dreadful agony, when doom is upon them the capacity for suffering is infinitely increased. Those now before us, when thrust into this hell, were seized with overwhelming and constantly growing dread of something, they knew not what. The very vagueness of the imaginary peril that besets them increases their dismay and aggravates the pain. Fleeing incessantly, they are ever hopeless of escape. A fixed despair weighs them down. Theirs is the anguish of the imagination, and their lot is grievous indeed.”

Into another of these chambers of torture the companions now made their way. It was spacious as the other, and thronged as densely. From the mouths, nostrils, and even the ears, of those who filled it, jets of furious flame were bursting forth. So numerous were these condemned, and so fierce each blaze, that, in the blended distance, the place appeared a vast and seething lake of fire.

In the presence of this abundant and sore distress neither Khoplé nor Mahagua experienced the slightest touch of commiseration. In its contemplation the sorcerer, bearing hatred toward all humanity, derived sullen pleasure. Mahagua, cold and merciless, had his wicked heart filled with a particular hate, which divorced him from his kind ; and he felt no stir of pity.

In the midst of all, he was moved alone by curiosity. Demanding an explanation of what he now saw, he received the following reply :

“ A perpetual burning preys upon, without destroying, the vitals of these wretches, its heat more intense, a thousandfold, than any known to earth.

“ They who are imprisoned in any of these unnumbered hells find their pangs, by accumulation, increasing with the moments. Thus it will ever be—each succeeding instant more dreadful than its predecessor—until the long period of expiation is accomplished.”

In the next of the infernal galleries to which Mahagua and the sorcerer passed they found the victims extended at length between huge masses of rock. The ponderous weight pressed them with a force that was crushing ; yet, under the stress, naught was broken and not a fiber torn. The bones were bending and distorted, the nerves and muscles strained from the places of nature, and the skin distended almost to bursting. The heads of these creatures hung, exposing to view countenances made hideous by the character of the torture. As Mahagua gazed upon the protruding eyeballs, the swollen features, and the black, out-hanging tongues, the thought suggested itself that to these unfortunates it would be infinite relief if the tendons would break or the stubborn frame give way.

In another hall of suffering numbers of the damned were suspended from above by innumerable cords. Such was the fineness of these filaments that they were scarcely visible. Back and forth, like a pendulum, each of the wretches violently swung. Again Mahagua demanded explanation.

“ At the end of each slender line,” said the sorcerer,

“is a tiny hooklet, caught securely into one of the nerves laced innumerably about the body. The weight bearing upon these cruel points racks each separate fiber; and the dreadful strain is aggravated by the force and momentum of the swinging.”

Mahagua had noticed through all these places that the eyes of the doomed were parched and dry, and that from their lips no sound escaped to break the oppressive silence.

“Why is it,” he asked, “that these pangs are all unwept, and no voice is heard from the multitude?”

“Tears and groans,” Khoplé responded, “are relief to misery and pain. They soothe the spirit and distract the mind. Even this comfort is here denied, and perpetual stillness envelops all. There is nothing to give vent to overburdened feeling, or for an instant to soften suffering.”

On, from one of these prisons to another, the companions passed, finding in each a torture different from the others—all, however, vieing in their intensity. At last, in this connection, the curiosity of Mahagua was satisfied, and he himself was almost overcome by fatigue. At his suggestion, therefore, further exploration was abandoned.

Now, the sorcerer, in his turn, was inquisitive, desiring to ascertain the effect upon Mahagua of all he had been observing.

“Thou hast seen a multitude of sufferers,” he said, “and beheld anguish in infinite diversity. There are yet millions of other hells. Some there are in which men of transcendent wickedness endure these pangs in various and overwhelming combinations. Some are even wrung by the blended distress of all.

“Dreadful beyond conception as these last must be, there are others yet, particular chambers of horror, that are more appalling. Into these, worst of all, must we be cast who have dared to invoke the intervention of the Powers of Evil, and bound ourselves to them by solemn compact. Knowing so much, dost thou now regret the crimsoned parchment?”

Mahagua remained silent some moments, and then made answer.

“Nay,” he said. “However terrible the doom incurred, it is a matter of my own concern. It can add in no manner to the joy or welfare of mine enemies. At any cost will I drag them down. If their ruin flows from the covenant I have made, the torture will never be regretted.”

CHAPTER LV.

THE MISSION OF MAHAGUA.

KHOPLÉ and Mahagua were both exhausted, and they cast themselves upon the rocky floor of the gloomy space. Even the discomforts of such a couch did not prevent their slumber. Long and soundly they slept, and with the morning awoke refreshed. As they opened their eyes, before them stood an emissary of the Demon Prince, and he thus addressed Mahagua :

“Thou art the mortal,” he said, “to whom the master sends commands. It is his will that thou repair to the palace of Ferozia, Sorceress of the North, to deliver into her hand this graven missive. I warn thee that her every power will be exerted to hinder or stay

thy course. With great perils and intense sufferings she will surround and persecute thee ; and craft and cunning will beset thy path.

“ All her efforts by courage and endurance may be overcome. She hath license to scourge and afflict, but she can not destroy. Woe to thee, however, if upon thy spirit a moment’s weakness falls ! A kyauck will bear thee swiftly to the border of Ferozia’s domain, and a fiery star will guide thy further way.”

When this address was concluded, the messenger presented to Mahagua a small black tablet, glowing with mystic characters, as though in letters of fire ; and then was gone.

“ Who is this woman ? ” Mahagua inquired of the sorcerer ; “ and why should I concern myself in delivering the tablet ? ”

“ She is an enchantress,” Khoplé replied, “ dwelling in far Mongolia, beyond the Great Wall of China. Her domain is surrounded by the Marble Mountains, and there she has ruled for more than three hundred years. She was the daughter of Kan Wang, Prince of Honan, and long the favorite of Arr Hee, one of the four great wizards of earth, acquiring under his tuition wide power in magic arts. She was filled, however, with jealous ambition, and after a time there was rivalry between the master and the pupil. War eventually arose, which was long uncertain.

“ It was then Ferozia appealed to the master, receiving augmented force. Thus she triumphed over her former patron, and swept him from her path. Even the rank she had thus usurped as one of the four great sorcerers did not content her, and a struggle sprang up between this enchantress and her mighty compeers. The

former prevailed, and the latter were forced to concede her supremacy.

“By the terms of her compact, she may reign until the master’s summons is delivered by a mortal, against whom, as he approaches, short of destruction or disablement, she may exert all her strength and cunning. If the resolution of the messenger be shaken, or he swerves or halts for a moment, the mission is defeated.”

“But why should I undertake a journey of this grievous character?” demanded Mahagua. “Where lies my interest in this sorceress, or her affairs; and how may this voyage of toil and peril advance my cause?”

“I know not,” Khoplé answered, “for as a sealed book are the master’s motives. The enchantress, however, is of surpassing beauty; and by her arts, through all these centuries, she has preserved her loveliness. It is possible that the master contemplates her employment to break the spell the Queen Anirah has cast about the Cambodian king.”

At this suggestion Mahagua was seized with eagerness; to him it seemed a revelation. It filled him with sudden zeal for the undertaking, and prepared him to encounter with resolution its trials and dangers. He was now all anxiety to proceed.

The admiration of Khoplé toward his companion now reached a point of culmination. Here the sorcerer recognized one possessed by hate fiercer than his own, and who, in prosecution of vengeful purpose, was bolder than the demons, rivaling in firmness Maqui himself, their mighty prince.

As the expected kyauck drew near, and Mahagua mounted, preparing for immediate departure, Khoplé fell prostrate and adored the man.

CHAPTER LVI.

THE BATTLE WITH THE BIRDS.

INTO the outer world, through the great portal of the Hall of Darkness, with the swiftness of lightning, the kyauck sped. The Isle of Demons was left behind, and the Sable Mountains themselves were buried in ocean. Soon the Island of Nippon, with its cities and temples, swept by; and then the waters of Whang-Hai, or the Yellow Sea, glistened below. When he had progressed thus far in the distance, Mahagua perceived what seemed a dark cloud heavy in his path. As he neared the mass, it was apparent that countless eagles composed it, drawn up, as though in battle array, to dispute the passage. Like the clash of contending armies was the stir of their myriad wings. Their attitude was threatening, but into their very midst the kyauck plunged.

With piercing cries they fell upon Mahagua, seeking to tear him with beak and talon. His short, keen falchion, retained throughout, was drawn as this danger approached, so that, weapon in hand, the onset was encountered. As the rush was made, he whirled the sharp steel in circles about him, cutting down the bolder birds that forced themselves within its reach.

They fell in great numbers, some dead and others bleeding and screaming, but the places of the fallen were thronged again. In this manner the battle progressed, the skill of the sword-play being such that not one of Mahagua's assailants was able to strike.

At last his arm wearied and the weapon was less swift. His enemies, however, were indefatigable, and in the end one, with swoop that was sudden and rapid,

forced the charmed circumference and fastened its talons upon the neck and face of the human foe. Thus the sweeping of the blade was hindered, and Mahagua had no recourse but to shorten his point and thrust it into the bosom of his feathered adversary. Thus was Mahagua unavoidably exposed, and the eagles clustered closer, tearing at him and fearfully lacerating his flesh. Bleeding profusely and intensely suffering, he still maintained the battle, piercing with his weapon many of the furious birds that hung about him.

Resolution, however, could not compensate the odds that were against him, and it was apparent that the conflict was drawing to a close. Amid the screaming flock the courage of Mahagua remained undaunted, and the tearing of sharp talons and gashing of strong beaks did not weaken his spirit, or bend the will of iron.

At this moment the kyauck, that all along had maintained its onward course, impeded but not arrested by the throng, succeeded in forcing through the struggling mass. Now, putting forth its utmost endeavors, the monster sped away, defying pursuit, even of the strong-winged eagles. The few still obstinately clinging to Mahagua were slain, and the first of the great perils that were to beset the path was surmounted.

CHAPTER LVII.

BATTLING WITH THE FROST.

A GREAT distance was traversed before a second ordeal was presented. Over rich valleys and cultivated

plains Mahagua sped, and over dense jungles and dreary morasses, by man seemingly uninhabited. Mountains and lowlands, glistening lakes, and broad, flowing rivers succeeded each other in rapid and panoramic succession.

So swift was the flight that the sun-rays were robbed of heat, and the cleft air, though still, was like strong and cooling winds. When the high plateaus of Mongolia were beneath, the atmosphere was raw and cold and discomforting to the warm blood of the south. A gale sprung up, blowing from the north, and gaining force until, in its fury, it almost swerved the kyauck from its course. It grew colder and colder every moment. A dark mist, heavy with moisture, was rolling over him, enveloping Mahagua in aqueous vapors and saturating his clothing.

The blast grew stronger still, attaining at last the impetuosity of the hurricane. The temperature fell so low that the water in the hair and garments of Mahagua was frozen. The rushing clouds were now laden with hailstones and fragments of broken ice. Each gelid particle had the force of an arrow, and they struck the face and body of the traveler, bruising his bones and lacerating the flesh. The pain was intense, and there was no protection except the partial one of lowering the head to secure the eyes.

Now, other pangs possessed the limbs and extremities of Mahagua, such as men experience when recovering from the bite of frost. With this torture came a strong yearning for rest and sleep, and he felt as though unconsciousness were the state of utmost bliss. He longed to escape his torment and drown in perpetual slumber the toils and sufferings of life.

At this moment a voice was in his ear, dwelling in soft and drowsing tones upon his agonies, and telling of others more dreadful yet in store. It strove to dissuade him from perseverance in the journey. Mahagua, despite his anguish and the stupor that oppressed him, held firm as ever. Believing it to be the sorceress that spoke, he strove with all his energy to answer.

“Get thee gone, enchantress,” with difficulty he muttered, “and be convinced that my purpose can not be shaken. In vain are all these cruel inflictions, and thy menaces have no force. So surely as the sun keeps on its march shall I hold mine until my mission is accomplished.”

Now, the drowsiness that was upon him grew heavier and his pangs increased. A deeper lethargy possessed him, dimming his faculties and casting its chains about the iron will itself. The longing for repose was almost irresistible, and the prospect of continued journeying intolerable.

Then to his vision appeared green valleys, with mossy banks, beneath palm-trees of full foliage, whose swaying limbs and rustling plumes whispered soft and soothing lullabies. By smoothest herbage these valleys were thickly carpeted, and the yielding grass trembled and bent to the touch of genial south winds until each beautiful expanse was broken into ripples and wavelets of verdure.

Bathed in warm sunlight, there all was bright and lovely, tempting to blissful slumber. From the pleasant groves came voices gentle and sweet as the murmurings of his native waters, or the aerial music of zephyrs among the palm-groves of Cambodia. They sang to him songs of rest, and the melody was enticing. Lis-

tening to the seductive tones, he was filled with desire to heed the warm inviting, whatever might be the cost.

In face of all, however, even to the crumbling away of other faculties, Mahagua's will was strong. He strove to utter his refusal, but the tongue would not obey.

As though the power that pursued him now recognized the failure of this assault, the visions melted and the voices passed away. The furious wind of the north began to lose its force, and then died completely down. The clouds with their icy burdens floated off, leaving the firmament azure and clear. Gently from the south reviving breezes blew. The drowsiness that oppressed Mahagua was lifted, and his limbs recovered suppleness and life.

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE ELECTRIC CLOUD.

PLEASANT reaction followed this torture and filled Mahagua with delightful sensations. It was freedom from pain, seeming, by contrast with preceding torment, rapture itself. He considered that Ferozia's domain must now be near and his trials drawing to their close, and the pleasing impression contributed to the joy of the moment.

This period of delight was not of long duration. In advance, along the line of journey, the mists again began to gather. Illusion was banished, and he foresaw that another ordeal lay immediately before him.

The clouds were reached, and they were so dense, and

so closely they hung about him, that the light of day was entirely excluded. The darkness that enveloped him, however, was lit by frequent flashes whose transient brightness disclosed the towering masses of vapor piled above and below. A sullen murmur pervaded, as though in warning of the approaching storm. The rumbling grew in volume until it assumed the proportions of a great continuous roar, loud and appalling. Suddenly a vivid burst of lightning blinded Mahagua, and he felt his frame scorched as if by the breath of consuming flame. His every nerve and tendon was racked as though being fiercely torn away. With the stroke came the crash of a mighty explosion, of which the deafening detonations seemed to shake the very foundations of the world.

There was no time to collect confused and scattered thoughts before flash upon flash followed in almost instantaneous succession, each inflicting an agony more intense. Then, with even greater rapidity, they fell, until, blending, they surged over him and through his shattered frame in a torrent of electricity. Never before had Mahagua experienced such torture. Even the dreadful pang that filled him under the terrible eye of Maqui, by comparison was light. During all this time the din and commotion were so horrible as to justify the supposition that all created things were involved in grand and universal ruin.

Again the voice of the invisible temptress was heard, striving to profit by the distraction of mind resulting from the sudden and protracted anguish that oppressed him. Mahagua's purpose, however, was unshaken, and his will solid as the granite hills.

It was not possible for human nature to long with-

stand suffering so terrific. The trial had been pushed to the farthest limit, and Mahagua believed that he was about to expire.

A strong wind at last blew up, and, rushing into the very heart of the clouds, it scattered them in every quarter. As, in broken masses, they rolled away, Mahagua experienced infinite relief, though remaining faint and weak. Indeed, so furious had been his pain that several hours elapsed before his strength was even partially restored, and a longer period was requisite to expel the soreness from his nerves and muscles.

CHAPTER LIX.

THE MARBLE MOUNTAINS AND THE GREAT WHITE PASS.

MAHAGUA had been closely scanning the surface of the earth. Beneath him no evidences of civilization were now discernible. All signs of fertility and of human habitation had likewise disappeared. Far as the eye could reach naught was apparent but barren plateau, breaking at places into high ranges or solitary peaks, black and repulsive. The temperature was low, and all indicated the near approach of the Marble Mountains.

Finally, on the northern horizon shone a line of almost dazzling whiteness, growing broader and brighter as the kyauck sped toward it. Mahagua was convinced that here at last were the snowy barriers surrounding the domain of Ferozia. They rose like drifts of win-

ter, heaped up in prodigious accumulation, reflecting the sunlight from unsullied fronts with surpassing brilliancy. In one grand curve to right and left they swept away, presenting to the outer world a face too steep and precipitous for human effort to surmount.

Now the creature that had borne its rider so well and far began to moderate its speed and flutter its wings, preparing to alight. At this moment Mahagua perceived a break in the glistening wall, seeming the entrance to some pass that led into the valley beyond. Slowly the kyauck descended from the height, sinking gently to the earth. Mahagua dismounted, and prepared to prosecute on foot the remainder of his journey.

Before him opened the Great White Pass, conducting to dangers and trials of whose nature he was ignorant. He now looked up for the promised star, beholding it in the heavens fiercely shining. Low upon the apparent horizon it hung, like a tongue of fire, directly over the gap. With quick and resolute steps Mahagua entered. Towering fronts rose high on either hand, their whiteness untarnished by soil or dust, and unrelieved by even so little as a blade of grass. Such was their tremendous height that only as a strip of blue the sky was visible above, seeming upheld upon the brows of the opposing precipices.

In one unbroken line, farther than the eye could follow, the long aperture ran before. In the distance its narrowing sides seemed blended into a single snowy mass. Within, all was arid and insufferable. No cooling breezes swept it, and the prisoned air was foul and burdened with oppressive heat. The strong light, as though in confinement, flooded the narrow space. Its dazzling was irritating to Mahagua's nerves, and pain-

ful to his eyes, reducing him to the verge of blindness. The ground was thickly strewn with powdered marble, milky white, and seemingly the result of the slow crumbling of the rocky surface on either hand. This dust was light and impalpable, and as he walked each foot sank deep, rendering progress extremely laborious. To increase his misery, despite all care, at every step the fine particles were cast up in clouds, filling the air and invading his throat and lungs.

Thus Mahagua was held upon the very verge of suffocation, painfully winning his way. Such was the persistence, as well as the gravity of this distress, that he was driven almost to yearn for death as a release from suffering. Every moment of progress was one of sore temptation. He longed for the pure air at the mouth of the pass ; and the struggle was close against the impulse that sought to force him back.

It was as though the sorceress, despairing of success by sudden assaults, was now resolved, by long and continued siege, to obtain the victory. No better result, however, attended this protracted effort than had befallen those more brief and furious that preceded it. Mahagua, unsubdued, still pressed forward, traversing the slow and weary miles, seeming almost interminable.

CHAPTER LX.

THIRST AND HUNGER.

MAHAGUA had been for many hours thus painfully compelling each step before the other, when, without

the slightest premonition from above, he heard a mighty crash. The solid bed of the pass shook as in the throes of an earthquake, and the great body of the mountain trembled on either hand. Looking up, he saw the high front of each impending precipice torn and rent by great fissures, and the cliffs were toppling. In another instant masses of marble, detached by the fearful shock, came falling into the depth. So many were these descending blocks and fragments that they blotted from sight the sky-strip above. Beneath the avalanche of rock, thus precipitating itself upon him, he felt doomed at last to destruction. Nevertheless, his courage did not fail, and he prepared to meet his doom with firmness.

He was, however, not fated so to die. As the downcoming heap was almost touching him, it swerved to the front and piled up in a high bank before him. He made repeated efforts to scale the barrier, but in vain; and was compelled to await the developments of the future.

In this manner his progress was so long impeded that the pangs of thirst and hunger were upon him. Day after day his pain increased, and yet no prospect of relief appeared. The avenue of retreat remained unclosed, as a temptation which, during the violence of his suffering, it was difficult to resist. Strength was leaving, and his frame wasting; but yet he would not retrace his steps. His mind became deranged, and he wandered back and forth aimlessly in front of the obstruction, ever careful, however, even in delirium, not to stray toward the opening of the pass.

To his disordered fancy now visions of sumptuous feasts and limpid, running streams appeared; always,

however, beyond his reach. Then a tall, dark woman stood before him, urging him to shatter the mystic tablet against the rock, and promising, if that were done, to lead him to the cooling waters and give the viands to his craving appetite. In his dementia, Mahagua took this figure to be Ferozia herself; and, although in the last stages of exhaustion, he again expressed the firmness of his purpose.

“In vain, O sorceress, thou temptest me,” he murmured. “Although my tongue is aflame and my bowels consuming, and though compared to such pains death must be a blessing, yet is my resolve strong as ever, and so it shall continue until my mission is accomplished.”

Then to his wandering mind the thought was presented of profiting by the presence of the sorceress to deliver the mystic tablet. He took it from the folds of his garments and tottered feebly toward the apparition. As he reached the spot upon which it had been standing, the place was void; and he, from utter weakness, fell to earth.

As Mahagua lay strengthless, again the sound of running streamlets fell upon his ears. Turning, he beheld a crystal fountain gushing from the rock. Fearing the repetition of former delusions, he nevertheless dragged himself toward it. His joy was intense to discover, at last, something real and tangible. Drinking eagerly from the refreshing flow, he was immediately invigorated and relieved. The beneficent waters dissipated the pangs of hunger at the same time that they assuaged the burnings of his thirst.

Thus restored, he again turned toward the marble barrier. It was no longer compact and impenetrable,

but changed into a heap of snowy cloud, already curling upward through the chasm. Casting his glances to the top, Mahagua beheld the dazzling brows of the overhanging steeps looking down upon him, perfect and unbroken. They stood, apparently, solid, as they were before the fearful detonation burst upon him, and the fronts had appeared to fall.

Chafing over the long delay already imposed, Mahagua did not wait for the fleecy mist to rise entirely; but, plunging through, was soon beyond, proceeding upon his way.

CHAPTER LXI.

THE BLISSFUL VALLEY.

FOR days the path of Mahagua was still flanked by the high walls of marble. Their perpetual presence wearied him, and the unvarying whiteness was ghastly in his sight. Before, narrowing in perspective, the path stretched ever away, seemingly without end. He plodded along persistently, until finally his perseverance was rewarded. Far in the distance shone a spark, as of burnished gold, growing brighter and larger, and portending a change of some nature. Mahagua now pressed onward with speed increased, and he was at last enabled to distinguish the cause of the resplendent shining. The Great White Pass widened before him, and its farther extremity was spanned by an arch, resting upon pilasters high and massive. All seemed cut in solid block, and forming part of the mother mountain. Enormous gates of polished bronze hung within the

mighty archway, so ponderous that the united strength of a thousand men would be insufficient to swing them upon their massy hinges.

For some moments, with feelings of awe, Mahagua stood in contemplation of the structure, and wondering how the passage might be forced. The difficulty, however, did not long perplex him. By force of enchantment the heavy portals swung. As they moved in slow circling, strains of ravishing music broke upon the air, sweet, soft, and voluptuous. Through the open gateway appeared a vista of enchanting beauty.

Mahagua entered, and about him lay a scene of indescribable loveliness. Smooth, grassy lawns extended on all sides, diversified by clumps of shady trees, and tessellated walks of variegated stone led in all directions. In the foliage perched or flitted a feathered throng of resplendent plumage, from the tiny golden-throat and the fiery-tailed sun-bird to the gorgeous peacock and the beautiful bird-of-paradise. Interspersed through the groves, and scattered about the verdant expanse, were magnificent pavilions of varied shapes. Innumerable fountains of delicate and graceful designs cast up their waters in fantastic sprays, which, falling, ran away in limpid streamlets to tiny lakes beyond.

Cool and pleasant zephyrs rippled the surface of the transparent pools, which bore upon their bosoms stately swans and graceful water-fowls. The balmy atmosphere was laden with sensuous perfumes, and in merry groups lovely and joyous maidens danced upon the sward to strains of exciteful music.

As though impelled by common instinct, the gleeful damsels gathered about Mahagua; with joined hands they formed great rings about him, swaying to right

and left, laughing and shouting. Others, within these sportive circles, keeping time to the rapturous harmony, tripped lightly as though in a dance of enticement. They would approach him coaxingly, and then, turning suddenly, retreat coquettishly, their light and willowy figures all the while bending and swinging gracefully.

Now, with voices soft as the chimes of silvery bells, they sang sweet songs of welcome, inviting the stranger to tarry for ever with them. In persuasive and melodious tones they chanted the beauties of this blissful valley, extolling its delights, and invoking him to rejoice over the felicitous chance that had brought him there.

This scene of voluptuousness strongly impressed Mahagua, and he was sorely tempted to hearken; but after a struggle, bitter as it was brief, his will was yet triumphant.

Still, as he pressed on, the maidens persevered, their swaying circles yielding ground, and those within persisting in their allurements. Mahagua, determined to break from a temptation that tried him, dashed suddenly forward and broke the lovely cordons. Thereupon the fairest of all the comely throng sprang toward him. Like the rest, she was lightly clad, with rounded arms and snowy bosom exposed. In wavy masses the golden hair swept over her shoulders and down her side and back. Casting her arms about him, she laid her beautiful head upon his breast and besought him to abide with her. The fragrant breath, the warm clasp, the soft cheek pressing against his own, the rich hair falling over him in a shower of gold—all sent a mighty thrill sweeping through his frame. For an instant his

eyes rested with rapture in the deep blue of those up-turned to his, and he drank the fragrance of her breath. The raging star already began to pale, and Mahagua indeed seemed lost.

At this moment, however, before him rose visions of Anirah and Konesset, powerful and happy, and over him bitter recollections surged. Hate, returning furious, summoned the iron will to a last supreme effort, and, gathering all its force, it was victorious. With strong hand Mahagua disengaged the shapely arms and thrust aside the pleading woman. As she fell, the mighty gates of bronze closed with a resounding clash that shook the marble mountains. The scene of beauty that spread about him vanished with its lawns and walks, its groves and fountains, and the lovely dancing maidens.

CHAPTER LXII.

THE SEMBLANCE OF THE DEMON.

A WONDERFUL change befell the surface of the country. Instead of the bright prospect that had delighted him, Mahagua was now confronted by a wide and gloomy marsh, slimy and repulsive, interspersed with sluggish streams and stagnant stretches green and scum-covered. Dark and dismal-looking trees, festooned with trembling moss, like beards of gray upon the palsied chin of age, darkened the dreary expanse. Great masses of rusty flags and dingy rushes further disfigured it, and blackened its waters by their decay. The atmosphere that brooded over all was heavy with foulness visible.

Vapors gray and poisonous rested upon its face, and the mire gave forth perpetually its fetid gases.

In great numbers, along the borders of the pools and at the margins of the torpid channels, stood water-fowl of weird appearance, while others flitted or darted from spot to spot restlessly. Among these haunting birds were some with long necks and flattened heads upon narrow bodies, all of which lent them the aspect of feathered serpents.

Mahagua beheld a light canoe resting upon the murky tide a short distance from the slimy bank. This was to serve him in prosecuting his journey. Between the water's edge, however, and the ground upon which he stood the ooze was soft and treacherous. Nevertheless, without hesitation, he advanced toward the boat. Under him the quivering mud gave way, and he sank to his knees at once. Every effort at extrication but plunged him deeper into the quagmire.

Retreat was still possible. The wiry grass that lined the brink was yet in reach, and by grasping it he might drag himself to shore. This, however, he would not do, but he labored strenuously to force his way. Soon the mire reached up farther than his waist and touched the armpits. He sank more and more, striving desperately, until his mouth and nostrils were invaded, and he was stifling and about to expire. Darkness was settling upon the face of nature when, in the dimness, appeared a figure bearing the semblance of Maqui, the Demon Prince. Thus the apparition spoke :

“Foolish mortal !” it said, “deeming we had need of thy puny efforts in the accomplishment of our designs ! How hath overweening vanity led thee through

fatigue and torture thus to an ignoble end, perishing in the foul depths of this polluted slough !”

In this artifice the purpose of Ferozia was to deceive and affright Mahagua, and so defeat his mission. For an instant he was misled, but the sentiment that possessed him was one of rage. Remembering, however, the cunning of her who was contending against him, he came to a more just conclusion. Struggling with the suffocating mud, in disjointed sentences he thus apostrophized the shape :

“ Begone, sorceress !” he said ; “ I know thee well, and am to be neither terrified nor deceived.”

At these words the specter vanished. Making a last desperate effort, Mahagua struck his foot against something firmer in the yielding mass that was overwhelming him. It was a branching root of the tree to which the canoe was moored. By its aid he raised himself a little, and, leaning forward, laid hands upon another support beyond. Even with these advantages violent exertions were required to extricate him. Covered with slime, he reached the boat at last, utterly exhausted, and clung to its side until sufficiently restored to draw himself from the water.

During the struggle he lost the weapon to which he had clung thus far with such tenacity. He was consoled, however, by finding the tablet still secure. Against attack he had now the paddle alone with which to defend himself. Nevertheless, he loosened the canoe, striking boldly forward as the star guided. The prow clove the scum that lay before it green and thick, leaving behind a long trail open and well defined.

CHAPTER LXIII.

THE ISLE OF SERPENTS.

IN places, above the surrounding ooze and water, the firmer land began again to show itself. Some low, flat island in the heart of this vast swamp was evidently drawing near. On either side of the sluggish channel now marshy banks arose, contracting slowly until the passage was so narrow that a leap of seventy feet could clear it from margin to margin.

The isle itself was at last in sight, divided by the torpid stream and heavily wooded. The waters between were alive with snakes of deadly venom, while in and about the trees upon the banks were enormous pythons and other monsters of like nature and of tremendous size. These reptiles were all in a state of great excitement, and the terrible noise of their concerted hissings was heard afar.

Cautiously, but without fear, Mahagua approached. Soon he was in the very midst of the swimming serpents, who reared their spiteful heads above the tide and struck at him viciously as he passed. The attack became so close and furious that at times he was compelled to use his paddle to beat off these dangerous assailants.

Meanwhile, from the shore on either hand, the larger snakes extended toward him their great heads and scaly bodies. Their threatening maws were opened wide to seize him, and they stretched so far across that only the closest watchfulness enabled Mahagua to escape them. He was compelled to keep the thread of the stream, a task made difficult by the constant necessity of striking

down the more active and venturesome of the hissing and spitting things that swarmed about him and strove to crawl into the boat.

Cool and collected, Mahagua remained in the midst of these distracting perils until, like its predecessors, this trial passed away. The island was traversed, and the land fell more rapidly than it had risen upon the other side. The banks were pressed back, and, sinking lower and lower, were soon marshy as before.

Mahagua, as he receded from the Isle of Serpents, still heard the hissings of its dangerous inhabitants. Looking back from a point of safety, the channel through which he had passed seemed black with venomous creatures. The larger reptiles moved angrily among the branches of the trees, violently contorting themselves and twisting together in great folds, giving thus fierce outburst to disappointed fury. As they smote themselves together, the harsh sound of chafing scales and the clashing of their armored bodies was like the jarrings of huge metallic plates.

CHAPTER LXIV.

THE NURSERY OF CROCODILES.

SPEEDING away from the Isle of Serpents, now, for the first time, Mahagua observed immense crocodiles in the lagoons scattered through the marsh. Lazily they swam the stagnant waters, or upon convenient logs were basking in the sun. The advent of a stranger seemed to disturb and anger them, and they turned

their hideous heads and fixed upon him their small and wicked eyes. Some, enraged, swelled their great bodies to enormous size, opening wide their gaping mouths, and disclosing rows of long and glistening teeth sharp and strong. Others, with fearful force, would clash their horrid jaws, whereof the loud and startling clang resounded far and near. Some, again, bellowed forth with discordant roars, and the mighty sound smote the water, which trembled as in the grasp of an earthquake. From all quarters of the morass these bellowings were answered, until the air itself was shaken with deep reverberations.

Meanwhile the huge reptiles were gathering in force. They left the lagoons and hastened toward the channel, following in long lines, threatening in the wake. From every lateral bayou fresh numbers would rush forth menacingly, and join the hideous procession, scrambling and fighting for precedence. Mahagua strained every nerve to outstrip these accumulating foes, for a time, seemingly, with success.

The stream began to straighten, and, far ahead, it expanded into a murky lake of limited extent. In the shallows on either side smaller crocodiles appeared, some fleeing in frightened clusters, while others, more bold, imitated the belligerence of their elders. Farther on these throngs increased, and now mothers were seen with broods, hastening their infant offspring to places of safety. Here was the nursery of the monsters that infested the region.

The dark waters upon which he now entered were swarming with scaly creatures, their odious heads thickly dotting the surface. Over the black bosom of the lagoon Mahagua moved swiftly, causing great commo-

tion among its repulsive inhabitants. The dreadful roaring had been quiet for a moment, but now, from numbers increased and with redoubled fury, it sounded again. As though under a common impulse, the angry reptiles in the lake now clustered directly in the way, like a hideous army preparing for battle.

Mahagua saw no means of avoiding them, and to advance seemed courting destruction. Nevertheless, the position of the blazing star indicated that this peril must be encountered. Dismissing hesitation, again he plied his paddle, resolved to abide the shock.

As he approached, his enemies seemed transported with fury. They swelled themselves almost to bursting by absorbing great quantities of air and water. Then, from mouth and nostrils, with terrific violence and appalling noise, what they had drawn in was expelled in heavy sprays and lighter vapor, the latter, like smoke, ascending into space. Many, breaking from the line, rushed to meet him, their immense maws opened wide and armed with threatening teeth. Plunging forward, they plowed deep furrows in the bosom of the lagoon, and cast a swell in volumes to right and left. Others, in their rage, by tremendous exertions threw themselves entirely from the water, clanging their powerful jaws and clashing together their armored tails with horrid din. The dark tide was lashed to foam till all about the maddened throng seemed white as driven snow.

Such a spectacle was well calculated to strike terror into the stoutest heart, but even among these thickening perils Mahagua was cool, resolute, and collected. In one moment more he was in the very midst of his dreadful enemies, who, with wildest ferocity, precipi-

tated themselves upon him. The boat was instantly crushed, and its occupant struggling in the very center of the furious mass. Their exceeding number for a time protected him, the monsters, in their eagerness, crowding and impeding each other's action. Nevertheless, he was buffeted, and, by the brushing of rough scales, his skin was torn until he bled profusely, and their feet cut deep into his flesh.

At length a ponderous tail swung high in air, and then descended upon the head of Mahagua, who sank unconscious to the bottom of the murky waters.

CHAPTER LXV.

THE DOMAIN OF FERROZIA.

RETURNING to consciousness, Mahagua found himself upon the margin of a lovely lake, and extended upon a bed of soft and velvety grass. Across its placid bosom the first glances of his opening eyes were cast. It seemed, in shape and outline, the counterpart of the filthy pond in whose murky deep he had been immersed. Its bottom was clear and pebbly, showing no trace of the slime and mud that had formed the bed of the lagoon. So the marshy banks of the latter had given way to smooth slopes, that brought their verdure, unbroken, down to the very waters they encompassed.

The hideous crocodiles were nowhere to be seen. In their stead floated stately swans of purest white, or swam aquatic birds of pleasing shape and attractive plumage. Some of these feathered creatures, more

playful than their fellows, sported in the pellucid tide, diving into the clear depths and rising again quickly to the surface, or circled above in short and graceful flights. Others, pretending anger, chased their mates over the white sands, beneath the shallows of the margin.

A broad and beautiful brook entered at the farther side. In size and direction only it resembled the sluggish bayou. Its current was not black and torpid, but bright and living. No dingy flags or decaying reeds disfigured its undulating course. The breezes that swept its surface and fanned the bosom of the lake came pure and sweet, and not ill-odored and mephitic. From afar the clear stream made its way through a wide and lovely plain, bounded, in the distance, by the glistening peaks of the Marble Mountains, and marked by branching rivulets irrigating the fertile expanse. The margins of some of these twining streamlets were lined with stately trees, whose darker foliage shone in pleasing contrast with the lighter green of the open places.

The eyes of Mahagua dwelt for some minutes enraptured upon the attractive scene thus spread before him. Then, with painful effort, he turned to observe what lay behind. Here all the beauties that had charmed him in the Blissful Valley were disclosed again—its greenswards and tessellated walks, its perfumed fountains and gay pavilions, its groves and runlets and pretty lakes. Still, beneath the leafy shades, and upon the grass, the beautiful women thronged, dancing joyfully, or chasing each other like sportful butterflies, their silken tresses and gauzy vestments floating in the breeze.

Behind all, to an altitude of a thousand feet, a symmetrical mountain rose. A succession of broad terraces, slightly sloping, one above the other, marked its incline. These were defended by heavy facings of solid masonry, each differing from the other in material and design. The lowest was deeper than all, and of massive granite, lending an appearance of stability and strength appropriate to the seeming base of the mighty pyramid. Marbles of every color, single and variegated, jaspers, malachites, and porphyry, followed in succession, relieved and ornamented by heavy bases, cornices, and moldings. The broad levels were connected at regular intervals by noble stair-flights, leading up in long lines to the flat, extended summit. These lofty ascents seemed like so many highways of snow, so pure was the marble of each particular step.

Elegant pavilions, obelisks, and pagodas, in harmonious proportions, stood upon each succeeding elevation. Many seemed built of burnished gold or glistening silver; while others were of richest porcelains or purest ivory, and some of ebony.

Around these structures, between the stairways, were gardens, spread with beautiful flowers and shrubs, sweet and florescent, giving forth delightful fragrance. Hum-birds of exquisite plumage, gorgeous butterflies, and humming-bees of Yunnan—the last rivaling all in splendor of coloring—hovered with fluttering wings above the blooms, or fitted from blossom to blossom.

CHAPTER LXVI.

THE PALACE OF FEROTIA.

THE summit of this wonderful mountain was environed by a paneled rampart, low and heavy. Imposing gateways received each climbing stair-flight, arched above, and flanked on either side by ample towers, surmounted each by a lion, carved in stone, grim, and seeming to sentinel the places below.

Within the orbit of the walls were lovely and extensive gardens, and groves of thick-set palms and other trees of graceful foliage. The palace of Ferotia rose from the heart of this space, resting upon a broad and circular base. Its form was rounded and built in two stages, the upper seeming, except in size, the counterpart of the lower. The flat roof of the latter extended out, forming to the other a circumjacent terrace. A deep peristyle encompassed each, of massive and imposing columns, with capitals richly foliated.

The monotony of each pillared circuit, one above the other, was broken by four great porticoes, facing the quarters of earth, and again at regular intervals by lesser ones; all grand and magnificent. To these majestic entrances rose flights of stairs, in keeping with the splendor of the surroundings.

Above the center of the structure, domineering all, a swelling dome sprung up, itself pointed by a tapering spire. Dome and spire were of finest porcelain, inlaid and embellished with silver, gold, and ivory; and when bathed in sunlight, they shone with dazzling luster. The remainder of the vast edifice, with its supporting platform, appeared a single mass of marble, out, by

magic, from the white core of the mountain-top; and throughout, not a seam or line of junction could be seen.

The minute description of architectural details, in a fabric so marvelous—its doorways and windows, columns and arches, cornices and moldings—would be a task of impossibility. Indeed, such was the harmonious character of the vast design that the eye, impressed by the magnificence and beauty of the whole, was slow to concern itself with particulars.

In the very heart of the edifice, extending up through both stages into the dome itself, was a lofty chamber, high and circular. Level with the upper story a gallery ran around, upheld on slender pillars in double row. From this central chamber, on either floor, four great halls diverged, leading to the principal exterior entrances. Others less important divided the spaces between, connecting this apartment with the minor porticoes. Still other corridors, at regular intervals, ran around in concentric orbits, creating, above and below, a net-work of passages.

This great rotunda was the throne-room of Ferozia, and there she held her court, receiving homage from inferiors in the art of necromancy. A diamond of dazzling splendor hung by golden chains from the apex of the concave. Its effulgence rivaled the brilliance of the sun, and banished from the place the darkness of night. The ceiling, in semi-sphere above, and the circling walls, were incrustated with sparkling adamants, smaller than their chief, and with rubies, sapphires, and other precious stones, which, gathering the light, gave it forth in countless gleams and lustrous sparkles of varied hues.

CHAPTER LXVII.

SIEGING THE HEART OF MAHAGUA.

MAHAGUA, when he recovered consciousness, had found himself sore and bruised, and unable to rise. His head rested in the lap of a lovely woman, who was bending over him, stroking his damp forehead with soft and shapely hands. Her tender eyes were fixed upon him, seemingly eager to catch the first sign of his reviving. To her, after observing the beautiful plain and the palace-crowned mountain, he turned his attention. It was the same woman who, in the Blissful Valley, had striven to arrest his progress. Again Mahagua sought to thrust her from him, but his strength was not sufficient.

The only return to this rudeness his patient attendant made was to place her ripe lips upon his pallid brow, and there implant a warm, impassioned kiss. Then, summoning a number of the damsels to her aid, with their assistance she placed the wounded man upon a litter, and bore him gently up the terraced mountain to the palace at its summit. His gaze, despite his sufferings, was attracted to the beauties upon either side of the long stairway, and his attention was so absorbed that he forgot his pain.

When they reached the marble pile Mahagua was borne into a large and commodious apartment, and placed at ease upon the soft cushions of a magnificent couch. Rich curtains of darkest crimson hung about it, excluding at will the flooding light. In this airy chamber for many days the anxious hostess gently nursed him, making meanwhile no effort to conceal her

tenderness, assumed or real. Profiting by his disability, she now laid siege to his heart, hoping thus to attain the success which had been denied the sudden onset delivered within the Blissful Valley. All the insidious and pleasing devices with which woman knows so well how to entrap the affections of man were put in practice. Lying helpless, he was the constant spectator of the attractions of her person, and subjected to the continuous fascination of alluring manners. He was conscious of the design, and sensible of the gravity of his peril. He strove incessantly against the inroads of passion, permitting to himself no latitude lest he lose control. Notwithstanding, however, the severity and long continuance of this ordeal, his strong nature maintained him still victorious.

At last Mahagua's strength was fast returning, and the temptress realized the necessity of pressing her suit more closely. She had already depicted in vivid colors the happy condition of those whose lot was cast within the domain of Ferozia. She had assured him that the sorceress was not cruel and unamiable, as declared by the fiends and their slave Khoplé, vowing that she was, on the contrary, gentle and compassionate, seeking her joy in the happiness of her subjects and the splendor of her surroundings.

"The Prince of Evil," she now added, "eager to subject the Sorceress of the North, tendered conditions of seemingly absolute immunity. These the hapless and deceived Ferozia gladly accepted, deeming them tantamount to remaining independent, with increase of knowledge and power.

"Who would have supposed," she asked, "that humanity could produce a being of such iron will as

thou? Who could have imagined a mortal defying the might and defeating the subtlety of one who is the queen of all enchanters?

“The wily demon,” she continued, “more far-seeing than his victim, knew that Mahagua would come some day to serve his end. The power that he gave, our mistress has employed with beneficence, striving to build within these Marble Mountains, and away from the habitations of men, a paradise upon earth, where, with those of her choice, she might exist, joyous and free from care. It is thou who bearest doom to all this, holding thine own fate in hand as well as ours.”

Here the woman paused as though expecting a reply. None came, and she resumed: “I, to whom it was permitted to know the fullness of thy heroism, and to witness all thou didst endure in the prosecution of thy dreadful journey, have found admiration ripen into an attachment that was not to be resisted. To serve thee for ever to me would be the happiest lot. No joy could equal that of possessing thy love in return for that I give.

“In this delightful place, blessed with enduring youth, and through long ages defended from the mutations of existence, we may enjoy each other’s continuing affection.

“Shouldst thou fail him, the demon must long remain unable to transmit the fatal summons that undoes us all, and destroys this Eden. Here his wrath is powerless, and within this stronghold, until the tablet of doom be delivered, the enchantress is supreme.”

CHAPTER LXVIII.

DELIVERY OF THE TABLET.

THUS his fair companion pleaded, her entreaties growing momentarily more passionate. Mahagua, however, remained cold and impassive. The bitter hatred of Anirah and Konesset still stood as a wall of adamant against all assaults.

The warm earnestness of the beautiful suppliant who knelt beside his couch, her loveliness, enhanced by tears, had aroused within him the surmise that here indeed was Ferozia herself. He deemed it wisest, however, to continue silent, hoping that the increasing excitement of the woman would compel disclosure.

The consequences were as foreseen. His indifference seemed to rouse her every moment to greater vehemence. In truth, her despair was heaping up. At last, convinced of the futility of such appeals, and seeing that delay brought no advantage, she felt that the time had come for a supreme and final effort. Rising suddenly, she flung her arms about Mahagua, holding him in a warm embrace.

“Oh!” she said, “let not thy heart be cold and dead as the marble beneath our feet! Behold how great is my love. I wait not until thy healing is complete, but put all at once into thy power. I, whom thou hast enslaved, am Ferozia herself, Queen of Necromancy.

“Thine is the dominion over all. Cast me not off again, but accept my deep and tender passion. Consent to rule as master at once over this bright domain, and over its devoted mistress, who will know hereafter no

law but thy command. Together let us live in the joy of mutual affection, scorning the wrath of Maqui, cruel tormentor of our race. Surely thou wilt not reject the assurance of authority almost unlimited, and of enduring happiness, only to place thyself again at the mercy of the ungrateful and implacable fiend."

As these fervent words were spoken, Mahagua, suspicious of artifice, was for an instant at a loss. Then there fell upon him the influence of the master, and doubt was gone.

He laid his grasp, still weak, upon the lovely arms encircling his neck. Ferozia, stricken with final despair, offered no resistance, and the clasp was loosened. Then in the hand of the enchantress Mahagua placed the tablet. The sorceress, as though stunned by a calamity so overwhelming, stood dazed and impassive; then a great cry of despair was uttered, which rang through the halls and chambers of the Marble Palace.

Ere its sound had died away she dashed the tablet from her, and fell again upon the bosom of Mahagua.

"Though thou hast wrought my ruin," amid sobs she exclaimed, "yet do I love thee still."

P A R T I I .

CHAPTER I.

THE ALARM.

THE happy condition of affairs, commencing with the elevation of Anirah to the dignity of Queen of Cambodia, had now so long endured that the people came to consider it permanent. The former excesses of Norodom were generously forgiven, and almost forgotten, and he himself was restored to the esteem and affection of his subjects.

The capital city had greatly extended its area, and been further embellished with monasteries, pagodas, and other structures of large proportion and imposing appearance. Its commerce was revived, and great numbers had flocked from other places to enjoy a share of its prosperity.

Of those attracted from the rural provinces, Atonga, the birthplace of Anirah, contributed many. These hoped that, mindful of the past, she would receive them with favor and minister to their advancement. In this they were not mistaken. The worthy among them found in her a firm and lasting friend. The most trusty were formed into a special body-guard to herself, and quartered in close proximity to the royal palace. The household of Alompra, Ragoba included, had come,

and, with the consent of the king, been accepted into her service.

This ancient domestic and friend still held strongly to his opinion relative to grave perils in store for his mistress, and he held the younger and less cautious Konesset persistently to his disguise.

Such was the situation at the inception of the occurrences we are now about to recite.

It was at this time that certain junks, engaged in foreign trade, entered the Cambodia River, bearing startling intelligence. So grave, indeed, it was that the officials stationed at the mouth dispatched their fleetest boats to bear it to the king. When the message reached the sovereign, the court was thrown into a state of unusual excitement, which extended itself to the populace of the city.

Messengers were dispatched in haste to all quarters of the kingdom, summoning to the Delta of the Great River the land and naval forces of the realm. From the western frontier, Senthwa, most experienced of Cambodian generals, was recalled, and dispatched to the same locality. Even this did not satisfy, and envoys were sent to the Rajahs of Ligori, Tringano, and other tributaries, demanding contingents of soldiers and war-boats.

The peril was considered so imminent that Norodom, fearing to await the concentration of his scattered troops, organized and armed the citizens of the capital, and of other accessible localities, and these were hurried to the coast. A great force assembled at the river's mouth, and daily their numbers augmented. The waters were swarming with war-canoes. In time, the large armies began to arrive from the frontiers, and

into an immense armed camp the sea-coast was transformed.

So soon as possible, Norodom himself hastened to the point of danger. Unwilling, in the hour of peril, to be separated from her husband, Anirah asked and was permitted to accompany him.

Meanwhile those who had first borne these alarming reports were summoned into the presence of the king. They had come through the Straits of Malacca from various places on the Sumatran coast ; and in the ports of their departure had received the tidings. The intelligence had been brought originally from Ceylon and the southwestern shores of Hindostan. The result of these examinations was to satisfy the monarch that what they recited was indeed a matter of notoriety in the localities from which these men had sailed.

CHAPTER II.

THE STRANGE FLEET.

THIS great commotion was occasioned by reports that a powerful navy was on its way to the mouth of Cambodia River. The rumor came from Ceylon, where the armada was said to have been driven by the fury of the last monsoon, many of its vessels in damaged condition. The injuries were such that extensive repairs were needed, and the fleet had put into harbor. The detention was considerable, and no secret was made of the destination. On the contrary, it was declared with seemingly officious care.

The rumors connected with this event were exaggerated and varying ; but all agreed that the hostile squadrons were large and powerful, and the vessels far stronger than the greatest war-canoes of Cambodia.

It was some time after the receipt of this first intelligence before definite confirmation was had. At last, however, the trading flotillas from Ceylon and Hindostan arrived, corroborating, in material respects, the statements of their predecessors.

Upon a bright, sunny day it was that the horizon disclosed to anxious watchers a few white specks. These increased in size and number until they stretched across the water, in almost interminable line. Larger and still more numerous they grew, until doubt was banished, and the stranger fleet stood revealed.

So soon as it was evident that here was the expected armada, preparations were made for immediate battle. So many, however, were the approaching ships, and so formidable and unusual was their appearance, that the Cambodians were terrified and ready to take flight. The strange vessels were of various shapes ; but all of great size and capacity. Far as the eye could reach, they seemed to cover the surface of the sea. Some were longer and more slender, evidently war-galleys, built for strength and speed.

From the sides of these latter great banks of oars extended, one above the other, rising and falling in strictest unison, and like the flappings of great wings. From the front of each, close to the water, prongs of iron, sharp and strong, sprung out, by which the enemies' war-boats were to be struck and sunk. Some had high and ornamented prows, and others tall, projecting sterns. Prow and stern, all were beautifully painted and gilded, and

decorated with images and rich carvings. From the center of many of these formidable ships turrets rose, dominating all ; while others, more dangerous still, had similar erections fore and aft. High decks stood to the front and rear, thronged with armed warriors. Below, protected and concealed from view by impenetrable bulwarks, and to the sound of music, the rowers performed their labor.

Some of these galleys were without canvas, depending solely upon their long and powerful blades for propulsion. Others had great tall masts and sails, the former terminating, as a mark of warlike character, in carved images of helmets. The armored men upon the boards were strange in appearance, their pale faces and long, heavy beards astonishing the soldiers of Norodom and filling them with dread. Besides these vessels that were devoted exclusively to war there were others, shorter and of broader bottom, and carrying greater cloth, but smaller complements of oarsmen. These followed in the rear, seemingly laden with the families and worldly possessions of this strange people.

The fleet approached the land so closely that the smallest details were plainly observable. So formidable it was that Norodom determined to avoid a combat upon the sea, believing that the narrower quarters of the river would give his boats an advantage.

CHAPTER III.

A MESSAGE FROM THE STRANGERS.

WITHIN easy arrow-flight of the land the advancing navy came to anchor. As each armed galley reached the line, the rowers ceased their labors, and the ship was brought to rest. Behind, the vessels of burden took position.

Now, from the heart of the armada, a slender galiot came. It sat low in the water, and sped toward the shore with the swiftness of a bird. As it was entering the principal mouth of the river it was challenged by sentinels upon the bank. The summons was obeyed, and a canoe put out immediately from shore to discover the object of this approach. The strangers by some means had secured an interpreter, and an interview was held. Thus it was ascertained that they bore greeting and a message, together with precious gifts, from their mistress, Almeta, Queen of the Western Seas.

This intelligence was brought to the King of Cambodia, who sent his permission for the landing of the envoy, with injunctions relative to the ceremonials to be observed.

As the pale men of the West disembarked, the curious Cambodians thronged the landing-place. Here the strangers, as was required, removed their sandals, and with bare feet made the remainder of their way. Immediately on coming in sight of the edifice erected for the temporary use of the sovereign, Norodom, they cast themselves to earth, making obeisance, and from this spot the ambassador and his interpreter alone went forward. Marks of homage were paid the structure at

frequent and stipulated intervals during the remainder of the progress. Even the royal elephants, by special command, received reverence as they were passed.

Within the palace, low abasement was made to the vacant throne, and the representative of Almeta fell prostrate and so remained until the monarch and his queen appeared.

Upon the brow of Cambodia's lord was a frown of displeasure. In severest tones he demanded the purpose of the threatening fleet, thus appearing uninvited upon his coast.

"Most Excellent, Glorious Sovereign of Land and Sea," the legate responded, making use of the prescribed formula, "Lord of Saddan, the Celestial Elephant, and of all White Elephants; Master of Sakya, the Supernatural Weapon; Golden-Footed Majesty; Sovereign Controller of the Present State of Existence; Object of Worship! on this propitious occasion the envoy of the August and Potent Almeta, Queen of the Western Seas and Ruler of all the Open Waters of the Earth, makes obeisance.

"My royal mistress, having heard of the mighty King Norodom, whose name shines with so much splendor through the world, has long desired to visit him, and in person solicit his good-will, that he may ever consider her his firm and true friend, as she will ever hold his Golden-Footed Majesty near and dear to her heart, so that their friendship shall never show diminution, but continue to increase until time is no more. Our gracious lady solicits permission to pay her personal respects to the Mighty Lord, King of Cambodia, and to his lovely and most noble spouse. As a token of esteem and amity, she prays acceptance of the precious gifts she sends."

Norodom, by nature suspicious, gave little credit to these declarations, believing still that the strange armada had come on a mission of conquest and plunder. By this sentiment his answer was dictated.

“Such pretenses,” he said, “do not deceive us. The fleet of thy mistress shall not enter the waters of our river, neither shall her people land upon our shores. Return and bear to thy queen, for our response, the command to depart at once with all her vessels.”

The ambassador waited deferentially for some moments, and, again prefacing with the high-sounding titles to which the sovereigns of Cambodia lay claim, he thus replied :

“My mistress desires not, without warrant, to enter the waters of Cambodia, or to land her troops upon its shores. In appearing at the Court of the Golden-Foot, she is willing to take such escort only as it may please thee to allow, depending for safety alone upon thine honor, so world-renowned.”

Norodom remained some moments silent and absorbed in thought. The size and formidable appearance of the stranger fleet alarmed him, and he was doubtful of his ability to resist it. He therefore considered it wiser to meet apparently with the same spirit this advance of seeming friendship. The proposition of the Western Queen, if rash on her part, was most advantageous to him, affording a hostage of the first dignity and importance. Having so concluded, his final answer was thus delivered :

“Such confidence is flattering, and proves the sincerity of the friendship tendered by the August and Potent Queen of the Western Seas, and Sister of the Sun. It compels, in return, our admiration and lasting

amity. Never shall our sovereign sister regret the reliance she thus reposes. Bear to thy most gracious mistress expressions of our good-will, and our royal word that an embassy of our highest nobles shall attend to do her honor and conduct her to our court."

CHAPTER IV.

LANDING OF ALMETA.

THE Cambodian nobles presented themselves before the Queen of the Western Seas, and the conditions of the landing and visit to Norodom were arranged. At the appointed hour Almeta, in a magnificent galley of state, proceeded toward the shore. The prow of this magnificent boat curved high above the waters. Its stern upheld a superstructure rising higher still—a graceful, tapering fabric, upon whose summit was displayed the great Standard of the Sea. The banner hung from a heavy cross-bar, with carved and gilded tips; and its center was blazoned with the image of a dragon, rampant and breathing fire. So heavy was its gold-embroidered silk that the passing breeze could scarcely lift or stir it. A high, broad canopy, with light, fantastic roof, adorned the center of the royal boat.

The barge of state that bore Almeta was built of darkest wood, like ebony, richly carved and relieved by a profusion of gilding. Upon a throne overhung with draperies of crimson satin, beneath the pavilion, Almeta sat, surrounded by the highest officers of the ocean

realm. She was attired in rich garments, and radiant with the sparklings of many gems.

In other imposing boats, and in galleys, followed dignitaries of the kingdom, and the armed escort, in numbers as stipulated.

The naval pageant shortly reached the strand and entered the river, passing up through the thronging canoes of curious natives to the appointed place of landing. This was adorned for the occasion, and obsequious mandarins received the stranger queen, and then joined in the procession that took its way toward the temporary palace.

As a token of respect to the royal visitor, elaborate decorations appeared on every hand. Bright and variegated mattings were laid along the entire line of passage, forming a wide and beautiful roadway. In close order, upon either side, posts of bamboo were planted, made gay with paint and gilding, and upholding an overarching lattice-work. This long, slight roof was laden with fresh boughs of various fruit-trees, full of vivid and aromatic blooms, interspersed with red-stalk jasmynes, odorous cassia, and bell-shaped passion-flowers. Thus above the route, through all distance, was formed a floral arbor, giving grateful shade and filling the air with Nature's sweetest perfumes.

The multitude that had been camping within them had already cleared the contiguous forests of underbrush. For the occasion, the tall trees were hung with festoons of green leaves and brilliant flowers. Tens of thousands of Cambodian soldiers lined the course, crouching low, armed with bow and spear, and bearing shields, round and spiked.

For the conveyance of the Queen Almeta, a superb

palanquin had been provided. It was rich with ivory, mother-of-pearl, and gold, and borne upon the shoulders of fifty men. High officers and *grandeos* of either realm succeeded, in magnificent sedans. Elephants, splendidly caparisoned, contributed to the pomp of the occasion; and beautiful horses, whose handsome saddles and silken bridles were decked with gemmed embroidery. Behind all came the disciplined soldiers of the fleet, stern and silent, marching in regular columns and with measured tread. The display in all was imposing and magnificent, testifying to the anxiety of the Cambodian king to propitiate the favor of the strangers and to impress them strongly.

CHAPTER V.

MEETING OF NORODOM AND ALMETA.

THE long and brilliant *cortége* held its way until a high and extended platform was approached. The surface of the latter was of split bamboo, firmly interlaced. At its farther end rose the temporary palace of Norodom, built high and broad, with fantastic roofs, all decorated in blue and gold. Precious tapestries were on its interior walls, worked with figures of flowers, of birds, and of animals. Its floors of slitted cane were thickly covered with a plastering of lime, firm, smooth, and polished like marble.

At the center of this structure was the Hall of Audiences, where, at one end, upon an elevated dais, three long divans were placed. On each were cushions of

velvet traced with gold. Their bases were adorned with effigies of the sacred white elephant, executed in fretted silver. Norodom was reclining upon one, and Anirah similarly reposed upon another. The King and Queen of Cambodia were clad each in robes of green satin, embroidered with flowers worked in crimson silk. In hand, as a scepter, each held a chowry of snowy color, indicating kingly rank, and made from a Thibetan cow's untinted brush. Long and solid chains of linked gold encircled neck and arms, emblemizing, by their length and magnificence, the dignity of the royal wearers. As pendants in their ears, large and brilliant rubies hung, whose ruddy fire illumined, where it fell, the silken folds of the rich costumes. Umbrellas of unspotted white, like the chowries symbolic of royalty, were placed conspicuously about the dais.

Crouching upon the lower floor, all on one side of the hall, were ranged, according to rank, the highest nobles of Cambodia. The opposing space was reserved for those that formed the Court of the Western Queen. The native mandarins were arrayed in garments and adorned with jewels, inferior in splendor only to those of the sovereigns themselves.

In front and to the sides of the elevated stage, to a distance, the jungle and forest had been cleared away. Within the open space thus formed, great masses of native troops were deployed. They bore innumerable banners of silk, and from the spear-ends hung gay streamers and bright banderoles. Thousands of singers and instrumental performers clustered about the platform, and men bearing great baskets filled with balls of silken paper, which, when cast upward, would develop into air-works of beauty and brilliancy.

As the Western Queen approached, the musicians began to play, and there was heard, in mighty chorus, the scrapings of violins, the twanging of harps, the pipings of flutes and hautboys, the beating of drums, and the blare of wooden trumpets. The chanters also raised aloud their voices, in hymns of adulation and welcome, that were heard even above the loud and boisterous clamor of the orchestra. At the same moment, and in rapid succession, the rolls of silk paper were thrown in air, mounting high and unfolding above into beautiful and varied figures. Serpents and dragons and great butterflies of rich coloring, birds of bright plumage, pavilions, pagodas, and palaces—all were thus portrayed on high.

Almeta now mounted the broad steps leading to the platform, and was soon within the bamboo palace at its end. As she entered, Norodom arose, advancing to meet his royal guest. Standing before him, the woman of the West was indeed an object of beauty, but it was not the soft and tender loveliness of Anirah. Hers was a beauty cold and malignant, such as fascinates rather than enamors. In personal appearance the stranger was radically different from the Queen of Cambodia. She was fair instead of dark, and her skin was pure and white as ivory, with cheeks rosy as the heart of a seashell. Her eyes were not black, but blue and hazy as the mountain-tops of Bassac. Neither was her hair raven, or cut and coiled above. Down her shoulders and back, long and loose, it hung in silken tresses, like a cataract of gold. Her teeth and nails were unstained, the former pearly, and the latter the tenderest pink of nature.

Her attire, rich but light, fitted closely, exposing a

shapely throat and shoulders and arms, bare and exquisitely molded. Her figure, rather tall, was slender and lithe, and charmingly proportioned. Walking, she was erect and proud, and her motions were willowy and full of grace.

Despite an attractiveness that was undeniable, there was about her form or manner something bespeaking a mighty pride, and a nature cruel and malignant. Each part and feature, however, seemed faultless, and, when examined closely, vindicated itself against the imputation of responsibility for the prevailing air of evil. Norodom, as he gazed upon her, was powerfully impressed. The beauty, so strange to a Cambodian, captivated him. He marveled at the whiteness of the skin, the azure of her eyes, and the golden radiance of the hair, deeply admiring all. As their glances met, in the depths of those blue orbs was the flash of a fierce passion, which kindled the smoldering fires of his own, and he felt already falling upon him the mysterious influence of the woman.

CHAPTER VI.

THE WELCOMING.

NORODOM conducted his guest across the Hall of Audiences to the dais at its end. There, in becoming manner, Anirah greeted her, and she was seated in state upon the vacant divan at the right hand of the king.

The tender and gentle Queen of Cambodia had never entertained toward a human being a feeling of hatred. Now, however, the wicked expression of the stranger,

which was seemingly hidden from Norodom, filled her with involuntary aversion. By a strong exertion, however, she repressed all indication and expression of this repugnance.

A sumptuous repast was spread, of meats and vegetables and luscious fruits, in greatest variety and profusion. Delicious wine, from the generous stem of the lofty borassus palm, was bountifully supplied. Anirah, alone, did not partake with zest. As the feast progressed, slaves, with great fans, stirred the warm air into cooling currents, while others sprinkled the atmosphere with sprays of exquisite perfume.

At the same time, in presence of the guest, jugglers and acrobats performed, and beautiful dancing girls whirled and postured, or glided with graceful, swaying movements. Upon the platform without were gilded cages, in which were captive birds, and below, upon the ground, in other prisons, numbers of the small and harmless quadrupeds were confined. One by one, and in pairs, these creatures were set at large. Thus the sentiment was expressed that all Nature, including the kingdom of animals, was rejoicing.

Through the remaining hours of the day, and far into the night, the banqueting continued. As the sun went down and darkness was falling, innumerable lanterns, of every shape and color, were lit and hung within the bamboo palace, and upon its roof and exterior walls.

The great platform was similarly illuminated, until all was flooded in a blaze of variegated light.

In the space beyond, the soldiers replaced the streamers at their spear-points with transparencies of brilliant and varied hues; and the broad expanse shone with tens of thousands of gleams and sparkles, reflect-

ing all the tinges of the rainbow. When at last the formal and magnificent repast was at an end, the royal party, still reclining upon the divans, were borne out upon the platform in front, to positions most favorable for witnessing the coming diversions.

Then the troops, bearing their brilliant and many-colored lamps, began to march and countermarch, and execute intricate evolutions, their close and ever-shifting lanterns lending to the plain the appearance of an immense and gorgeous kaleidoscope. The paper air-works gave way to pyrotechnics of elaborate designs, which peopled the dark skies with effulgent and beautiful figures, and lit them up with fiery splendors. Thus were the heavens and the earth made to vie with each other in resplendent rivalry, and the eye was loath to lose for an instant the brilliant attractions of the one even while it enjoyed the glories of the other.

In this manner were the entertainments continued, until, despite the stimulation of pleasure and excitement, Nature was able to endure no more. Then, reluctantly, the royal party were compelled to retire, and for a time the superb display was suspended.

The following day, however, saw a repetition of the feasting and revelries of its predecessor; and thus, for more than a week, the festival was upheld. Even in the Orient, that land of splendid and costly festivities, never before had there been a jubilee equaling the magnificence of this.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CAPITAL ILLUMINED.

WHEN the period assigned for these displays was expired, the stranger solicited permission to visit for a while, as a guest of its monarch, the capital of Cambodia. Against the granting of this request Anirah contended, and, since their marriage, for the first time Norodom refused compliance with her wishes. She was impelled to this objection by a dark foreboding that the presence of this strange woman portended evil. This early evidence of the waning of her influence confirmed these apprehensions, and filled the Cambodian queen with uneasiness and distress.

To quiet the fears of the king, Almeta consented, during the period fixed for her sojourn in the country, to send away the powerful fleet that menaced its shores. A force of five thousand warriors and their ships she retained by stipulation. The great armada, with this exception, weighed anchor and departed, followed, as a measure of precaution, by the Cambodian junks around the Malayan Peninsula and through the Straits of Malacca, many leagues, until it disappeared in the waters of the West.

In the mean time, with their guest, the royal party had undertaken the journey to the capital. Up the mighty river their voyage was a triumphal progress. The royal barges of Almeta and of Norodom, with their gorgeous decorations, were followed, according to rank, by numerous boats of the *grandees* of either realm, all tastefully built and richly ornamented.

News of these events had spread far and near

throughout the country, arousing the people and exciting their curiosity. In addition, Norodom had sent commands causing the populace to decorate their boats and houses, and to gather in throngs to witness the passage. The palaces and monasteries, the temples and pagodas, and every structure along the banks of the Mekong, to the lowest hovel, were hung by day with streamers and bright festoons of flowers or tissue-paper, and by night with transparencies and sparkling fireworks.

Thus, along the entire route, all vied in the magnificence of their expressions of welcome ; but the culmination was reserved until the capital was reached. The progress had been so regulated that this point was attained during the earlier hours of the darkness. A large part of the metropolis rested upon the bosom of the waters ; the houses built upon rafts of bamboo, moored to the land, edging the river. Along the city front innumerable junks were anchored, and other sailing craft of various sizes and descriptions, while canoes and barges glided among them with swift and restless motions. Not one of these numerous vessels, large or small, but was fairly laden with brilliant lamps of every color. The floating houses were similarly illumined, and the wide passage-ways, existing at regular intervals and dividing the habitations into blocks, shone like avenues of celestial light. The dark bosom of the tide itself was thus lit up, until it seemed a sea of glory.

Upon the higher ground, beyond the oozy margin of the stream, lay the royal palaces and those of the mandarins and superior officers of state ; the government buildings and the tall pagodas and temples, and the many-roofed and pinnacled monasteries, in great number.

Each was lit as though in a burst of variegated fire, that followed and marked with its tracery every column and arch, and other detail of architecture. From the river and the shore great bombs were shot in air, exploding with loud detonations and expanding into great and luminous suns of resplendent blaze ; or showers of stars, lustrous and varihued ; or huge, coiling serpents of flame, which wound their length across the face of the heavens.

By these means the city and its harbor were flooded with radiance, displaying a scene vieing in brilliancy with the Halls of Light themselves ; whence comes the brightness of the day, and where Pra-Enn, the Celestial King, holds perpetually his angelic court.

For the accommodation of his royal guest, Norodom had caused to be erected, within the spacious grounds surrounding his own, another palace in every respect the counterpart of its elder sister. So limited was the time allowed for execution by the sovereign's mandate, that the minister charged with the undertaking, in order to accomplish the task, was driven to adopt measures of extraordinary vigor and severity. Thousands of laborers and artisans were impressed and put to work in the forest and quarries, and in the jungles. In this manner quantities of heavy timber, and great heaps of bamboo and masses of rock, were speedily secured and transported to the capital. There, by other multitudes, these materials were dressed and prepared, and employed in the building of the fabric.

Despite the heavy force engaged, such was the exigency of the occasion, that in face of the scorching sun, blazing overhead, and the stifling heat, these unfortunates were compelled to great and continued exertions

that were beyond their strength and habits. Cruel masters stood over them, using the lash without mercy. Many of these poor wretches, thus sorely and perpetually urged, succumbed to the overpowering calidity of the weather and the fatigue of excessive labor, some falling dead in their places, and others, under furious blows, crawling away to lie down in some corner and die.

Thus the work was kept in rapid progress, while thousands were barbarously sacrificed. The palace, however, was completed according to the wishes of Norodom ; and there it stood, in every particular the same as its prototype, prepared to receive its guest, the Queen of the Western Seas.

CHAPTER VIII.

ANIRAH LOSES HER HUSBAND.

WITHIN this new edifice the stranger queen took up her abode. Here everything was provided that could promote her comfort or minister to her pleasures. The land and sea supplied their choicest contributions for the table ; and dancers and musicians, acrobats and jugglers, were furnished for her amusement.

The number of foreigners permitted to remain in the country was considerable ; but Norodom had suffered few to advance so far as the capital. Of the five thousand that had landed with Almeta, only two hundred, as a body-guard, were stationed within the precincts of the new palace. The remainder were encamped on the

banks of the Great River, above its delta. As an additional precaution between them and the metropolis, intrenched camps were established, each occupied by a force of native troops. These strongholds lay directly in the path, to prevent, on the part of the alien warriors, a sudden or successful advance. One of these armed stations was just at the edge of the lower suburb of the city, but beyond its walls. Within the inclosures of the palace was the Atongan body-guard of Anirah and household troops of the king, numbering, in all, at least two thousand men. In view of these measures of caution, and of the smallness of the detachment of strangers in his immediate vicinity, the monarch felt secure.

The day that Almeta had placed foot upon the soil of Cambodia had, indeed, been unfortunate for the Queen Anirah. From the moment that Norodom first beheld the beauty of this woman of the West her influence began, like a fascination, to possess him, and his heart passed from under the dominion of its legitimate mistress. The latter, observing the change so rapidly growing, was filled with sorrow and despair. To be forced to struggle with another for that love which should be hers beyond dispute, and which, without question or interruption, she had in fact so long enjoyed, was to one of her high spirit galling and humiliating. Nevertheless, devotion toward a husband thus proving himself unworthy, and solicitude for the welfare of her child, enabled her to perform this duty, however repugnant. Loyally, therefore, she engaged in the contest, doing vigorous battle against the intruder's growing influence.

The virtuous spouse, whose charms of intellect and

person so long had bound the fickle affections of this man, and forced upon him, as it were, a nature which was not his own, in such a warfare was not easily to be worsted. All that loving heart and generous soul could suggest, by way of fixing the wavering fancy of her husband, was resorted to in the hope that he might yet be saved. On the other hand, the Queen of the Western Seas had now openly entered the lists. Pretending an overwhelming passion for the Cambodian king, she hesitated not, for the purpose of gaining the victory, to pay him shameless and perpetual court. All was done that a dissolute and unscrupulous woman can attempt in order to weave about wavering man the meshes of her control.

For a time the scales hung uncertain. When Norodom found himself in the society of his pure and generous wife, he felt toward her all the old love, and vowed to expel the temptress from his dominions. Under the charms and wanton caresses of the stranger, however, these virtuous pledges were forgotten. They who have the power to fly the presence of evil solicitation and remain, will find themselves unable to resist. Hesitation is a confession of weakness, and a first yielding that is certain to be followed by others more pronounced.

So, in this instance, it happened that the visits of Norodom to the palace of Almeta became more frequent and protracted, until Anirah felt that at last the scepter of her empire over the heart of her husband was broken. On his part the king, unable to endure the sting of her reproachful glances, soon came to absent himself entirely from the presence of his wife, and to spend his time at the abode of her rival.

CHAPTER IX.

ANIRAH FINDS HER BROTHER.

KONESSET, greatly distressed, concluded that now the time had come to disclose to his injured sister the secret of his identity. He therefore sought, without delay, a fitting opportunity for making the revelation. An occasion was not long wanting. Since the unfaithfulness of Norodom had passed beyond all hope of remedy, Anirah could endure no witnesses to her distress, and, by her own command, was always alone. Restless under the burden of her misery, she wandered often, unattended, through the remoter halls and chambers of the palace, brooding over her sorrow. Thus was an opportunity afforded Konesset, of which he availed himself, approaching with care, so as not to startle or affright her. He was equally cautious to avoid the shock of a disclosure too sudden in its nature.

“Most gracious Mistress!” he said, crouching before her, “pardon the seeming rudeness of thy slave. He prays thy Majesty to excuse his boldness, considering the important and welcome intelligence he bears, and which he humbly prays permission to disclose.”

That Morari, in violation of positive command, should thus force himself into her presence, startled and astonished Anirah. It was a breach of etiquette so grave that, from a potentate less merciful than Cambodia’s queen, it would doubtless have evoked an angry and immediate condemnation to death. The manner of Morari, however, was so respectful and impressive that Anirah did not even think of resenting the intrusion. She was so anxious to learn the nature of his

tidings that the question of offended dignity was forgotten.

Her heart was heavy, and it was solely with her sorrow that her mind had been filled for many days. She naturally and at once associated the promised revelation with him who was the cause of her distress. Turning toward Konesset, she commanded him to proceed.

“Most gracious Mistress,” he accordingly resumed, “it is concerning one whom thou hast long considered dead that I venture to speak. Although, after the murderous attack in the mountains, I left thy brother Konesset, believing him without life, I have been apprised that he in fact survives. After I had departed, he revived, and pushing away the stone from the cavern’s mouth, wandered for a while, feeble and bleeding. A caravan, that had been unusually retarded in its return to China, discovered and cared for him. A merchant, specially concerning himself, brought the master to his home in the heart of Quang-si. Here, notwithstanding the devoted attentions of his merciful host, he lingered in slow process of recovery, and it was only after long delay that his strength was restored, and he was able to undertake the journey to Cambodia. Passing through many perils, and enduring infinite toil, he reached his native land and traversed its length, until the capital was attained at last. He is now within the city, awaiting anxiously the opportunity of presenting himself before thee.”

This story was in every respect improbable, but it served the purpose of Konesset, which was to break the sudden force of the disclosure he was making. Anirah, astonished and for the moment joyful, was not in critical mood, and she gave ready credence to the recital.

She had loved her brother dearly, and deeply mourned his supposed loss. Now, the prospect of his restoration was like the breaking of light into the darkness.

Notwithstanding Konesset's caution, Anirah was greatly agitated. She flushed and grew pale by turn, her lips quivered with emotion, and the trembling frame was about to sink. Thus far she had been standing, but now, feeling faint, she turned toward the wall and cast herself upon a cushioned divan that stood against it. Beckoning Morari to her, she again addressed him :

“ Why does he not come ? ” she asked.

“ Most gracious Queen,” was the response, “ had he done so without warning, the shock might have wrought thee serious injury. Furthermore, thou hast him alone to depend upon for protection. Were his presence known to thine enemies, he would be at once deprived of power and opportunity of aiding thee. He is in disguise, and deems it prudent to maintain it ; and his intercourse with thee must be conducted with strictest caution.”

“ He was always wise,” Anirah sadly answered ; “ but bid him in mercy hasten the hour of our meeting.”

Now Konesset rose slowly to his feet and stood before the queen, earnestly gazing upon her face. In one of his seeming condition such conduct, by the law of the land, was flagrant treason. There was something, however, in his bearing that recalled the happy days at Atonga. So strong was this impression that she returned, almost involuntarily, the close and scrutinizing regard that was fixed upon her. All her efforts, however, could not strengthen into remembrance this shadow of recollection. Konesset, deeming her prepared, determined without further procrastination to reveal

the secret. No set or formal words were needed, and all he did was softly to call her name.

The tone was that she had heard so often during the blessed period of childhood. It loosened the bonds of memory, and at last she knew who it was that stood before her. She sprang from the divan and cast her arms about him. Thus, those that had been so long together, but still apart, were again united, and, after many years, the sister's head rested once more upon the brother's bosom.

CHAPTER X.

KONESSET FINDS MAHAGUA.

AMONG the officers accompanying Almata to the Cambodian capital was one, Orthys by name, who seemed in rank and authority second to the Queen of the Western Seas herself. Upon him devolved the management of her household, and he alone, of all his associates, appeared to occupy toward his mistress the position of companion and adviser. His skin was darker than that of his fellows, and his fiery eyes were black as night itself. Upon his features malice had so conspicuously set its seal that the people, meeting him in the streets of the city, were disturbed by the malevolence of his countenance. He appeared to hold over the evil woman an influence that was potent and controlling.

Ere this, the king had passed so completely into the toils as to have lost all power of resistance, and to have become the slave of Almata. She swayed him more

absolutely, even, than Anirah had done in the bright days of his reform. The dominion, however, that was now upon him was as vicious as that of the past had been virtuous and beneficent.

No sooner was her authority firmly established than she sought to compel Norodom to divorce his legitimate spouse, that she herself might be raised to the dignity thus made vacant. Against this demand the monarch, despite his fascination, made a struggle. Then the wicked creature let loose upon him the fury of her temper, which he—so great was his infatuation—was without energy to check or resent. At last, as a measure of compulsion, Almeta withdrew herself entirely from his society, declaring that he might not hope again to see her until, by yielding to her commands, he had proven the sincerity of his passion. Against such deprivation Norodom was not able to maintain the contest, and he speedily succumbed. The royal proclamation was accordingly issued, declaring the deposition of Anirah, and the elevation of Almeta to the dignity of queen of the realm.

So soon as the startling intelligence reached her, Anirah felt that she could remain no longer in the palace of the king. She determined upon immediate flight; but Konesset urged a postponement, and she yielded to his advice. In the mean time a cordon of sentinels had been placed about the royal grounds. This was due to the suggestion of Orthys, and became, through Almeta, a command to the monarch. It was ostensibly a precaution against the abduction of the prince, Norodom's son and the heir presumptive to the Cambodian throne.

Almeta and her wicked adviser were endeavoring

perpetually to arouse against Anirah the anger and hatred of Norodom. Thus far they had been without success ; but there was every danger for the future.

Meanwhile Konesset, to preserve his own liberty, adopted every possible precaution. He kept, so far as possible, in strictest seclusion, never leaving the palace except in close and changing disguises. Nevertheless; he kept a watch, strict as safety would permit, upon the dwelling-place of Almeta. Orthys particularly attracted his attention and scrutiny. There was about the latter something so familiar that Konesset could not believe him an utter stranger. The enigma was one he was anxious to solve, but for a time it seemed beyond his power. The hope of unraveling it was a principal cause of his lingering about the quarters of the enemy. On occasions he would catch a sudden glimpse of him who was the cause of this perplexity, and feel himself upon the very verge of discovery ; but the secret would still defy him.

At last he determined, at all hazards, to hear the voice of Orthys, hoping thus to stimulate his memory. With this object he spent the dark hours of several nights in the shadows under the walls of Almeta's abode, or in the obscurity of the trees surrounding it. He met at first with no success ; but his patience, however, was eventually rewarded.

As he was standing at one time in the gloom, two muffled figures emerged from the building and repaired to a pavilion lying some little distance away. When they had entered, Konesset approached, and, peering in, distinguished the forms of a man and woman sitting together. She, in subdued tones, was addressing her companion. The voice was earnest and full of plead-

ing, and, to the astonishment of Konesset, her words were not in a foreign tongue. Listening, he discovered that the woman was Almeta herself. She was upbraiding the one that sat beside her; but her censures were in accents of sadness and not of anger, and mingled with expressions of endearment. He who was with her was not Norodom, and, for a time, the watcher was not able fully to distinguish him. He supposed, however, it was Orthys upon whom this tenderness was being lavished.

Here, indeed, was a strange discovery. This stranger queen, who had cast her evil spell over the King of Cambodia, was herself in a bondage, seeming, from the tenor of her words, bitter and of little hope.

Orthys was cold as she was impassioned, making no reply to the protestations of affection, and no response to the warm caresses with which they were frequently accompanied. At last he lost patience with the woman.

“I have often told thee,” he petulantly exclaimed, “that, until my vengeance is consummated, there can be no room for love within my bosom. Thou hast declared that regard for me, more than obedience to the will of Maqui, impels thee to the task assigned by the master. Prove the sincerity of this passion by forcing these matters to a more speedy determination, for to me the delay is intolerable. When our purpose meets success, and mine enemies are destroyed, then, as I have sworn, thou shalt be the mistress of my heart. It is not, however, for wooing that we have sought this spot of seclusion. There are matters of more present import that demand discussion. Cease, therefore—”

Konesset, finding the posture assumed growing irksome, at this moment sought to change it. The move-

ment was incautious, and his foot struck against the base of the pavilion. The noise fell upon the sharp ear of him that was speaking, and instantly he sprang from his seat. As he did so, Konesset was likewise up, and speeding through the darkness. Orthys immediately gave the alarm, and the grounds were filled with men bearing torches, who searched closely, but in vain.

The results of this adventure were important. The voice of him who had been an enigma was recognized : it was that of Mahagua himself.

CHAPTER XI.

PREPARING FOR THE BLOW.

THE key to the situation had now been found, and Konesset, comprehending more accurately the nature of the peril, could better provide against it. Knowing so well the vindictive and implacable character of Mahagua, he felt the gravest apprehension for the personal safety of his sister. Indeed, his astonishment was that her life had been spared so long.

Their enemy was at no loss to determine who it was that had listened at the pavilion. On the following night the palace of Anirah was surrounded, and, under the personal supervision of Orthys, vigorous search was made for Konesset. He, however, through the hidden exits, had escaped in time.

The period had come for immediate action. The first thoughts of Konesset directed themselves to the secret passages as a means of flight. It did not, how-

ever, seem just to abandon all without an effort; and his spirit rebelled against surrendering, unresistingly, to the abominable woman, the place and dignity of Anirah.

There were many things to favor a course more heroic. His sister was greatly beloved by the populace, and there were large numbers of Atongans at the capital who were particularly devoted. About the palaces and within the walls of the city a considerable body of native troops was stationed, and to these, by reason of many benefactions, the deposed Queen of Cambodia was particularly endeared.

Almeta, on the other hand, had about her not more than two hundred of the warriors of the West, the remainder being yet encamped below. A successful uprising of the people was, therefore, possible; but Konesset considered it more prudent to attempt a movement less general in its nature. A sudden assault, at the hands of a few hundred, might accomplish all with less labor and delay. The strangers, no doubt, could be surprised and destroyed; and the usurpation of their mistress ended with her life.

The plans of Konesset were speedily matured, and he found no difficulty in securing, among the Atongans, the requisite number of resolute and determined men. Anirah was advised of all, lest the sound of sudden and unexpected battle should alarm and injure her in her weakened state. When informed of the contemplated attack, her gentle nature shrank from the thought of bloodshed, particularly on her own account. She pleaded earnestly for the abandonment of the enterprise, and that she be permitted, instead, to seek safety in flight. The sensible reasoning of Konesset, however, prevailed.

It convinced her that it was a duty to endeavor to snatch her husband from the toils of the wicked woman, and to preserve the rights of her child, at the same time relieving the people from the despotism again falling heavily upon them. Since the accession of Almeta, Norodom had been rapidly developing the vicious traits that had marked his early career. From her sorrow, therefore, Anirah took time and thought to pity her unfortunate subjects, seemingly entering upon a second reign of blood and terror.

CHAPTER XII.

REVOLT OF THE ATONGANS.

THE second hour after midnight was chosen for the time of assembly, and under the outer wall of the royal inclosures, within the grounds of an adjoining monastery, was selected as its place. The night chosen for the attack was favorable in every respect. In and about the threatened palace all was dark and silent; and, in their cloister, the priests were sleeping profoundly.

The assailants were now divided into two detachments, over the larger of which Konesset retained personal command, the other being placed under the authority of a leader of acknowledged discretion and intrepidity. The most perilous and difficult duty was assigned to the first—that of storming the main entrance to the building. The second was to deliver a simultaneous attack in the rear. When all the preliminaries were

arranged, Konesset led away his men, moving cautiously in the dark shadows. There was no interruption until the advance guard turned an angle, and was skirting the front of the inclosure, approaching the neighborhood of the great gate. Then a sound struck upon their ears of voices low and subdued.

Creeping forward, they discovered, in the gloom, a man and woman engaged in whispered but earnest conversation. She was Cambodian, but her companion was a warrior of the body-guard of Almeta. The stranger had evidently won the heart of some maiden of the land, and here was their place of tryst. Into willing ears he was pouring the story of his passion.

Informed of this incident, Konesset, halting the column, went forward to reconnoiter. Observing the condition of affairs, he was prompt to determine upon a mode of procedure. He chose a trusty companion, and both cast themselves to earth, crawling cautiously toward the unsuspecting lovers. Konesset was to slay the foreigner, and his associate to seize and silence, or, if necessary, dispatch the woman.

The fatal spring was made, and a shortened spear pierced the heart of the soldier, who fell with a severed sentence of tender import clinging to his lips. The woman was not to be slain unless safety absolutely demanded the sacrifice. So violent, however, was the hatred of Konesset's companion toward the aliens, that he considered it a debasing and unpardonable crime for a maiden of Cambodia to bestow her affection upon one of their number. What he now beheld was, in his eyes, a disgracing of the whole people, for which death itself were scanty punishment. He, therefore, from the first, was resolved to be the executioner, and with her blood

to obliterate, at least partially, the stain of this dishonor. The consequence was that the maiden shared at once the fate of her Western wooer. Konesset was grieved by the slaughter of the former, but this was no time for expostulation.

The gates were guarded and could not be passed, and here was a secluded and convenient spot at which to scale the inclosing wall. It was accordingly surmounted, and the Atongans hastened toward the palace entrance, that was to be the object of their attack. The line of sentinels was soon in sight, and the men were formed in order ready for the onset. At the other side of the building their companions were in waiting, anxiously expecting the signal.

Now the shrill call of Konesset, blown upon a joint of bamboo, pierced the still night air and was answered from beyond. The hasty challenge was unheeded, and, before it could be repeated, they that had uttered it were weltering in their blood. The Atongans rushed impetuously on, striking down, with indiscriminate fury, all that stood in their way. Thus they gained the portal and entered within. Here, however, they were confronted by a few of the foreign guard, hastily assembled, unarmored and scarcely clad, but firmly resolved to hold their own. So determined was the resistance of this handful that the assault was checked. As the fighting progressed, the scanty band of the defenders was being strengthened momentarily. The tide of battle was stayed, and almost ready to turn. Konesset saw that here was the crisis of the occasion. He raised his heavy sword once more, and, shouting to his wavering companions, he cast himself into the very midst of the enemy. Inspired by the heroism of their leader, the

Atongans followed, and such was the fury of the onslaught that the defense was utterly crushed.

The pale warriors, however, made no attempt to fly, but died as they stood, battling to the last. The victors pushed through to meet their friends from the other side. The attack in that quarter had not been so successful. Here the strangers, in compact mass, were holding the assailants at bay. Now, however, they were charged from the rear by Konesset and his men, and speedily overwhelmed. Emulating the courage of their comrades at the front, these men maintained the hopeless conflict until all were destroyed.

Turning back, the Atongans now swept through the building, slaying as they went. Valuable time, however, had been consumed in the struggle, and some of the household escaped into the darkness. The principal object of the storming was thus defeated, for the most rigorous search disclosed no trace of Almeta, or of Orthys, or the King Norodom.

CHAPTER XIII.

DESPERATE MEASURES.

KONESSET was sorely disappointed, and compelled now to direct his thoughts to measures more desperate in their nature. The royal fugitives had undoubtedly fled to the camps below the city, and Norodom would return with heavy force to wreak vengeance upon all implicated in the attack upon his palace. Against an army formidable as that which was now to be expected

the Atongans alone could offer no resistance. Konesset, however, was not a man to yield lightly to despair. There must necessarily be ample time for the escape of Anirah and her child; but he considered their rights, together with the safety and welfare of the people, as worthy of a greater struggle. He was, furthermore, too just to abandon those who had followed him into danger, and imperiled all in the cause of their mistress.

Giving the subject all the deliberation to which its importance entitled it, he finally resolved to undertake the subversion of Norodom's authority, and the establishment in its place of that of the deposed queen, as regent, during the incapacity of the prince.

This purpose, though bold, was not unwise or unfavored by circumstances. The people were devoted to Anirah, and were already suffering greatly from the returning horrors of the olden rule. Since the accession to power of the strangers, the native mandarins had been thrust aside, and the foreigners had conducted themselves toward the people with insupportable insolence. They had also been guilty of innumerable crimes, many diabolic in their nature. The royal palace and all the insignia of authority were already in the possession of Konesset, and this, of itself, in Eastern lands, has often determined the question of supremacy. The treasury of Norodom was filled, and the public armories abundantly supplied, and of all this the revolution would have command.

The first step was to secure the adherence of the household and other troops within the walls. Here no difficulty was experienced, for of these soldiers many were Atongans, and all were attached to Konesset and his sister. A proclamation was now issued calling the

people to arms. It was engrossed on strips of palm-leaf in many copies, and read, upon the streets and public places, to multitudes assembled by the beating of gongs and the blaring of trumpets. The fleet of war-canoes in the river was seized, and the municipal gates shut and heavily guarded. A new government was immediately organized, with the most influential mandarins in the places of trust and honor. These appointments were conditioned that the chosen should at once identify themselves with the cause, and labor for its success.

An appeal was made to the priests inhabiting the monasteries of the capital to aid in the expulsion of strangers, all of whom were infidels and devil-worshippers, and supposed to have erected secret shrines to the Evil One, at which unholy rites were performed. This solicitation was successful; even the High-Priest of Cambodia, moved by the danger to religion, lending to the revolt his countenance and influence.

The people, collecting in vast throngs, were addressed from a hundred stands in all portions of the metropolis; and to the troops encamped upon the outer edges of the lower suburb an embassy was sent, in the hope of enlisting their support.

CHAPTER XIV.

UPRISING OF THE PEOPLE.

IMMEDIATE success attended the first efforts of the revolution. The nobles chosen for positions of importance responded with alacrity. Those of the better

class, not so honored, fearing Norodom, and aggravated by the insolence and aggressions of the strangers, rallied also to its support. Even the priests, in great numbers, issued from the temples, exhorting the people to uphold the new sovereign and resist the restoration of the old.

Over all the face of the mighty metropolis was stir and commotion, and the rumbling of great tumult. The crowds momentarily increased, and the general agitation was augmenting. Even the women were upon the streets, urging their husbands and sons to the conflict, and exhorting the leaders to proceed at once to the attack and extermination of the hated foreigners.

To the projector of this uprising these things were eminently satisfactory. Nevertheless, although the capital was fully aroused, all was yet chaos and confusion. He felt that, unless the movement was brought under order and system, it would result in bloody and disastrous failure. He therefore addressed himself at once to the work of organization. The city was divided into districts, over each of which was appointed a commander of energy and experience, charged with the duty of enrolling and disciplining the people. The latter were formed into detachments and fully officered, and the contents of the arsenals distributed according to need.

When this was all accomplished, it was found that the revolution had at its command fully sixty thousand combatants, fairly weaponed, and constituting a garrison sufficient to hold the walls against any force likely to be brought against them. Time was required for Norodom to gather his troops, and this delay Konesset employed to the best advantage. The recruits were

exercised in the rude tactics of Cambodia, and familiarized, as far as possible, with the use of arms. The women and children and older men were put to strengthening the ramparts, and to gathering upon their tops, and on the roofs and terraces of the temples and other buildings, great heaps of broken rock. Every structure within the battlements was barricaded and made strong, until the Cambodian metropolis became a place of citadels.

From among the oldest and wisest civilians, and the most experienced soldiers, a council of war was organized to advise with Konesset during the crisis that was at hand. One of the first matters submitted for deliberation was the course to be pursued with regard to the troops encamped immediately below the city. These were under the command of Gunhaz, a prince of the royal blood, who had seized the emissaries of the people and caused their immediate execution. The heads of these unfortunates, fixed upon stakes of bamboo, were still planted in full view—from the city walls—of distressed relatives and friends.

In the consideration of this question the council was at first divided. Konesset believed this slaughter should be immediately avenged. Furthermore, the hostility of this army being assured, he considered it important to destroy it before the arrival of re-enforcements, and before its strength was added to that of Norodom's other troops. A few opposed action so speedy and pronounced, but finally yielded, and the attack was unanimously determined upon.

CHAPTER XV.

BATTLE OF THE SUBURB.

THIS being determined, Konesset set himself to arranging details. Intending a surprise, the purpose was kept in secrecy. His design was to occupy a position in the rear of the enemy, and then attack in force from the city. At the selected time the detachment that was to pass the hostile camp was embarked and floated down the river. The moon was yet weak, and, by keeping close under the shadow of the opposite bank, the passage was effected without discovery. At a safe and convenient spot a landing was effected, and the line of march was taken up. As the army forced its way through the thickets, tigers and other ferocious animals, startled by the unwonted appearance of many men, sprung from their lairs and fled, growling and snarling, while venomous serpents, in great numbers, hissing loudly, glided into the deeper jungles. As the opposing camp-fires came again in sight, a halt was commanded, until the first flush should appear in the east to indicate the hour of the assault from the city. Soon the Orient began to pale, and to the strained ears of the men came, at length, the sudden shout of war. Among the foe all was now stir and confusion. The loud voices of the leaders were heard calling to the defense, and urging determined resistance. Before they could form, however, the citizens were upon them, and they conducted the struggle at terrible disadvantage.

In face of the complete surprise, the warriors of Norodom fought courageously, and for a time the conflict raged. The troops below were to remain in am-

bush to intercept retreat, and to participate in the strife only in case of absolute necessity. To them, as they lay in concealment, with varying sound came the shouts of the combatants and the clashing of arms. Hither and thither the clamor swayed and shifted as the tide of battle ebbed and flowed. Repeatedly as they hearkened, judging it necessary, those in hiding were on the point of engaging, when the changing tumult would again relieve their anxiety.

The enemy at last began to give way. Singly, then in knots, and later in bodies of increasing size, they fled, seeking a passage through the jungle or along the water's edge. These, as fast as they reached the detachment under cover below, were slain. When the defeat of the foe was assured, and concentration was no longer required, this force was deployed from the stream to the swamp. Along the brink of the morass a thinner line was also extended. The war-canoes, at the first sound of conflict, had likewise spread themselves over the river's surface, so as to bar escape in that direction. In this manner the soldiers of Gunhaz were encompassed. Flying from the fury of those who had sallied upon them, wherever they turned they were still greeted by sounds of slaughter. Many, including the general himself, cast themselves into the tide, hoping to reach the opposite and safer shore. Among these the canoes were busy, and the current of the Mekong was red with blood.

The destruction upon land and tide was terrible indeed, and of the thousands who, a few hours before, were sleeping without fear or suspicion, not so many hundreds survived.

CHAPTER XVI.

MEETING OF THE FLEETS.

IN the mean time Norodom, with a heavy force, was approaching the capital. The soldiers of Almeta accompanied him, ascending the river in their galleys. The council of Konesset, confiding in numerical superiority, were unanimous in the opinion that the flotilla of the foreigners should be attacked and crushed before it reached the city. The young chief alone did not trust the ability of his war-canoes, whatever their number, to cope with the large and powerful ships of the West, and, with earnest eloquence, he pointed out the dangers of such a movement. It frequently occurs that men, ordinarily wise and deliberate, in the presence of grave emergencies become insensible to reason, and are carried away by impulse or enthusiasm. So, in this instance, the logic of Konesset, notwithstanding its soundness, was without effect. The youthful commander, little versed in affairs of war, and finding so many emphatic and persistent that were older and more experienced than himself, unfortunately yielded, not, however, without hesitation and misgivings.

The war-canoes were accordingly prepared, and dispatched against the enemy. As they departed, the scene presented was well calculated to fill the hearts of the people with hope and exultation. The long and narrow boats fairly covered the broad bosom of the river, and the burnished shields and weapons of the soldiers flashed back the sun's rays. Full of reliance, the elated warriors rent the air with shouts of anticipated triumph. Urged by the strength of the paddles

and of the wind and current, and amid the acclamations of the populace, like a whirlwind of destruction the fleet sped swiftly out of sight.

It avoided the shore held by the land forces of the enemy, and after not many hours the squadron of *Almeta* was in sight. The archers of *Norodom* opened from the bank, but the citizens, in the eager expectation of immediate victory, pressed boldly forward, imagining the enemy to be in fear and confusion, and scarcely conceiving it possible that serious resistance was contemplated.

There was, however, no terror on board the ships of *Almeta*. The commotion there was the stir of active preparation for the coming battle. The crews were busy making fast the sails and ropes, and casting to the tide all that was superfluous, that their vessels might be light and manageable. The rowers took their stations, and the long blades were thrust through the vacant oar-holes until every range was filled. Then the sound of music was heard, and, at this melodious signal, the galleys sprung forward, and the array was formed across the river. The superior officers, descending into small boats, plied from ship to ship, exhorting the men to deeds of heroism.

Meanwhile, with noisy demonstrations, the fleet of the capital was advancing. There was no form or system in the method of their attack. The strangers, however, instead of abiding the assault, became themselves aggressors. From the central and tallest mast-head was hung, as a signal for the onset, a burnished shield of brass. The air was now obscured by flights of darts and arrows passing back and forth, and the line swept onward. In another moment the navies were

together. The huge vessels of the West were handled with admirable precision, and their sharp beaks pierced the Cambodian shells, that were too frail for such a mode of warfare. Some were crushed, and others split from stem to stern. The ill-fated occupants, panic-stricken, cast themselves into the stream, or, losing sense in terror, sought safety by clambering up the sides of the hostile galleys, only to be thrust back with spears and javelins.

Those of the canoes that were not sunk at the first collision came on still boldly, clustering around the prows and quarters of the enemy, and striving to make fast. Some that were in them clutched the great oars and held them by weight of numbers, while comrades sped their arrows, or, sword in hand, sought to gain the decks above. The pale warriors, with long spears, thrust the climbing natives back, or overwhelmed them with showers of darts. From the tall mast-heads grapplings of iron were thrown, which, fastening into the benches and interior work of the Cambodian boats, held firm while the latter were dragged from the water. Masses of lead and iron, shaped like dolphins, were likewise dropped with crushing force into the war-barges below.

So skilled were the foreigners in the use of these dreadful devices of war, and in the management of their ships, that, at slight loss to themselves, they wrought great havoc among the citizens. Nevertheless, the latter had conducted themselves throughout with astonishing heroism ; but their courage gave way at last. When fully two thirds of their canoes were sunk, and the greater portion of the crews were slain or wounded, in despair those remaining abandoned the conflict and fled toward the capital. The spectacle now presented

upon the broad surface of the river was harrowing. Hundreds were contending with the tide, striving for the shore. Of these, scores, at every moment, from wounds or exhaustion unable to support themselves, were sinking into the depth. The stream was covered with fragments and with shattered boats, to which men too grievously hurt for swimming clung in desperation. The bowmen of Norodom lined the bank, uniting with the archers of the victorious fleet in the destruction of the unfortunates as they struggled for the land or floated helplessly by.

CHAPTER XVII.

DESTRUCTION OF ALMETA'S FLEET.

LIKE a thunderclap the intelligence of this disaster fell upon the people ; and its effect was depressing. The incidents of the battle, in themselves sufficiently appalling, were magnified and distorted. The tales of the survivors were such as to impress the populace with the conviction that the pale men were demons, against whom it were vain to strive. So general did this sentiment become that Konesset was satisfied that, unless he could destroy the prestige of the foreigners, he would be unable to hold the city against them.

The capital of Cambodia numbered over three hundred thousand dwellers, and it lay on the bank of the river, just as it emerged from the expanse of Thalè-Sap. It followed the stream some miles upon its downward course, and its upper suburbs extended along the lake.

By far the greater part of its inhabitants were upon the water, in light houses, on rafts of bamboo. The number of these floating domiciles reached up into the tens of hundreds, and it was upon them that Konesset settled, as furnishing a possible means of annihilating the ships of Almeta.

The immediate abandonment of these tenements was decreed, and the people accommodated themselves as best they could upon the land. The abodes that were thus vacated were of light material and thatched, and exposure to the sun had seasoned them until they were excellently fitted for service as fire-rafts. Scarce had the commands of Konesset been complied with before the army of Norodom appeared before the walls. Simultaneously the fleet of the enemy also hove in sight. At this signal the remaining war-canoes were thrown across the channel, as if to dispute the passage. Elated by recent victory, the ascending flotilla advanced to the attack. After a show of resistance, however, the Cambodians gave way, retiring up the river, the galleys pursuing. In this order the lake was reached, where the fugitives turned, as though seeking a place to beach their barges and escape. At last their boats were, in fact, abandoned, and taken into the possession of the foe.

All of this had consumed much time, of which Konesset had availed himself. When the strangers returned with their capture they found the way blocked by lines of houses extending from bank to bank. Supposing these obstructions intended merely for floating fortresses, they approached to reconnoiter. At this juncture a number of the tenements were cast loose from the upper end of the city, with a score of men, swimming behind each, to guide its course. The sur-

face of the tide was shortly covered with these drifting structures, all bearing down rapidly upon the hostile ships. One by one these rafts were set ablaze, and fire was set as well, in various spots, along the barricade. Konesset had not intended, except in case of necessity, to sacrifice all the river-houses of his people; but the populace themselves, frenzied by the excitement of occurrences so stirring and unusual, rushed in great bodies along, firing and casting loose, until not one remained at its place of mooring. Thus the bosom of the stream was converted into a sea of furious flame, whose glare paled the sun and illumined the heavens with fiercer light. The waters hissed and bubbled with intensity of heat, and all were driven from the brink. The paint and gilding blistered and fell off from the palaces and structures that lined the bank.

Meanwhile, appalled by a spectacle so terrific, the strangers, for a time, were lost in bewilderment and confusion. Valuable moments were gone in irresolution and uncertainty, until discipline itself departed, and the galleys turned, each for its own safety, toward the land. So hasty and disordered was this movement that the vessels interfered and collided with each other, so that several were sunk, and many of the men were drowned, or slain by the arrows of the citizens. As the surviving galleys touched the shore their crews deserted them, escaping into the jungle; and the ships themselves floated back into the current, or were consumed where they lay.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE GRAND ASSAULT.

THIS advantage had been purchased by the destruction of more than half the metropolis ; yet the unthinking people were delighted with the result. A severe blow had been dealt the foreigners, and the populace, exultant, were heedless of the cost. The victory was of the utmost importance to the cause, demonstrating, as it did, the vincibility of the strangers.

Norodom was filled with fresh rage and a stronger determination to conquer the city and visit vengeance upon its inhabitants. The infuriated king would take no advice calculated to delay his revenge, but determined upon an immediate and general assault. The warriors of the West suggested postponement until the walls were breached, when the storming would be more easy and certain, and less expensive of the lives of his soldiers. The monarch was not doubtful of success, and he was reckless of the slaughter, even of his own men. He did, however, consent that his allies should erect works and engines of simpler kind, whose construction would not consume much time. Under the instruction of the foreigners, these preliminaries were advanced with wonderful celerity. Great ladders were constructed of seasoned teak, and quantities of bamboo were made into fascines. Towers were built of heavy plank, some distance from the opposing ramparts, and from their tops archers, and a few of the aliens who were slingers, annoyed the garrison. Ballistas and powerful catapults hurled their terrible missiles into the heart of the beleaguered place, sweeping the battlements as they went.

In the face of these strange and murderous appliances, the citizens behaved with courage, striving manfully to prevent or retard these operations by continuous flights of arrows.

The impatience of Norodom would scarce withhold the assault even until these things were done. It was, therefore, in vain that the foreigners solicited further time for the rearing of more powerful engines. As an immediate precursor of the charging columns, a storm of projectiles burst upon the walls. The Western warriors were not permitted to participate in the immediate attack. Although their mistress had enslaved him, toward these men the Cambodian sovereign shared the prejudices of his people, and he was resolved, with his own soldiers alone, to effect the subjugation of his rebellious subjects.

At the word of command, in great swarms the native troops rushed forward—some with bundles of fascines to fill the moat, while others upheld the ladders and sought to rear them against the rampart. Konesset had been an anxious observer of all that was transpiring, and was, therefore, fully prepared to meet the onset. In addition to the heaps of stones which have already been mentioned, there were upon the battlements quantities of pitch and oil, with an abundance of resinous, fierce-burning woods. By means of these, great fires were now blazing upon the tops, and seething caldrons were foaming with heat. As, however, the supply of these boiling liquids was not ample, they were to be employed only as a last resort.

As the enemy advanced, they were annoyed with missiles of every kind, and it was long before their ladders could be fixed. As fast as these were uplifted the

citizens seized them from above, and over each was a trial of strength. Many were cast off, with those that had begun to climb, crushing scores beneath their weight. These disasters, however, did not dishearten the assailants, who still persisted in their efforts. As fast, however, as they clambered up, the people thrust them back with sword and spear; but the living and unhurt were ever ready to assume the places of those that fell, maimed or lifeless. Fresh troops were being hurried continuously from the rear, so that, notwithstanding the slaughter, the number of those that were attacking was undiminished.

By fighting long and close the soldiers of the capital were at last exhausted, and the foe began to press them back, and to occupy the ramparts. A lodgment was thus made at almost every ladder-top, and momentarily the circles were extending. The defenders were finally stricken with sudden panic, and had begun to abandon the walls. The warriors of Norodom, on their side, were already shouting victory, and all seemed lost for the city.

Those immediately about Konesset, inspired by his presence, were not thus overwhelmed with disabling despair, but had now recourse, with effect, to the flaming faggots and seething liquids. The great mass of their comrades, however, given over to despondency, or robbed of all judgment, did not follow the example. Casting his eyes along the battlements, Konesset took in at a glance the peril of the situation. His thoughts were quick as lightning, and his resolution formed in a flash. Starting from his place, he rushed along, taking neither time nor care to avoid those that were crowded in his way, but hustling them roughly from his path.

He raised his powerful voice, and it was heard over the din and confusion of battle.

“The oil! the oil!” he shouted as he ran. From mouth to mouth the cry was taken, until, like a hurricane of sound, it swept from end to end. As if by words of magic, the whole aspect of affairs seemed changed. Seizing the ignited brands, the citizens hurled them, dripping with blazing resin, full in the faces of the foe. Others dashed upon them the bubbling oil and pitch. So eager were the defenders now, that, in the frenzy of the moment, they received themselves unheeded burns, many of serious nature.

In a short period the ramparts were again clear, and the people, exulting, followed up, pouring the scalding liquids into the countenances of those yet striving to mount from below. Blinded and in torture, most of the climbers fell, screaming, into the moat. Then, seizing the ladders, to which in their agony a few were yet clinging, the victors cast them off, with their living, suffering burdens. Under the walls were yet masses of Norodom's troops, seeking, with eager courage, to join their comrades above. When, however, these heard the cries of their companions, changing suddenly from tones of triumph to those of anguish, and saw them falling, scorched and disfigured, they themselves were stricken with panic, and fled in confusion across the plain.

CHAPTER XIX.

FORCING THE GATES.

NOTWITHSTANDING its own heavy losses, over this great success there was jubilee within the beleaguered capital. On occasions like this, those that have lost father, son, or brother, friend or dear husband, are the only ones to mourn. Their fellows, elated and glorified by victory, and rejoicing over their own good fortune, have no heart for tears.

Among the enemy there was as much depression as in the capital there was joy. The army of Norodom was demoralized, and could not be led again to the assault. The king now bitterly regretted the over-confidence that would not wait until the walls were breached, and the jealousy and suspicion that had driven him to reject the advice and co-operation of the strangers. Realizing the desperate condition of his fortunes, he was now as anxious to conciliate the favor of these men as, before, he had been careless and supercilious. They, seeming to forget the indignities to which they had been subjected, responded to his appeal and undertook the reduction of the city. They erected new and more powerful machines of war. Great, movable shelters of plank were raised, under whose protection mines were sunk, and from which the archers opened a closer fire upon the walls. Under similar cover, high mounds of earth were thrown up, defended by wood-work, and many rising higher than the ramparts. These heaps, in turn, were crowned by massive towers, dominating the capital. Upon these elevations the engines were put, and slingers and archers also occupied their tops.

Now, with other missiles, fiery shafts were sent, which, falling upon the roofs beyond, kindled many fires that were destructive.

Other tall structures were reared in several stories, and, upon strong wheels, were rolled up close to the opposing battlements. From the lower apartments, ponderous battering-rams were worked, delivering furious blows, that resounded above all. By means of these concussions several of the more important gates were driven in; and mines had reduced the muniments, in other places, to mere heaps of ruins. All was now ready for the final assault, and again the signal was given.

From points of advantage, numbering hundreds, a discharge so fearful was opened upon the metropolis that the citizens were driven from the wall-tops. Then, from the central stages of the rolling towers bridges were thrown across, and by tens of thousands the soldiers of Norodom thronged over, becoming undisputed masters of the ramparts. Seeing the condition to which the defenses had been reduced, and finding his troops thus unresisted, Norodom was again filled with overweening confidence, and restraint was removed from the jealousy he felt toward his allies. Indeed, this feeling had gained augmented force, for natures such as his always resent as an offense favors which their necessities compel them to accept. Believing, therefore, that opposition was virtually crushed, he hastily sent peremptory commands to the foreigners to retire to their quarters.

Against every important breach the king now directed a heavy force to co-operate with those that already held the tops. His men, encouraged by the apparent discomfiture of the enemy, advanced again with bold-

ness. The people, however, in retiring, had gone no farther than the line of nearest houses, under cover of which they awaited the foe. As the storming columns forced their way through the ruined gates and broken battlements, the defenders sallied forth and drove them back with slaughter. Then, to escape the missiles from above, the victors would hasten back to cover, prepared to repel further aggressions.

The besiegers, still brave, attempted repeatedly to conquer these stubborn positions; but as often they were repulsed. Thus, during the remainder of the day, back and forth across the intervening space the tide of battle surged. Despite all disadvantages, the citizens were firm and heroic as ever. They knew the character of the master they had discarded, and who was now striving to return. To exclude him was a matter of life and death, and they were resolved to resist to the bitterest extremity. Therefore it was that the night again fell over an unvanquished city.

CHAPTER XX.

THE BATTLE IN THE STREETS.

WITH early light on the succeeding day the battle was renewed. The result, however, was even more disastrous to the interest of Norodom. His troops, at last, becoming disheartened, would not again advance. The king, though stubborn and reckless of slaughter, was himself finally convinced that, in this manner, nothing could be accomplished.

The men of the West, seeming forgetful of preceding discourtesies, at the commencement of the second day of close fighting had again solicited permission to participate in the battle. The answer, however, had been petulant and insulting, and their commander had sworn never again to tender or afford assistance to this ungrateful monarch. Now, dejected and despairing, the latter once more recognized his mistake, feeling that in the superior discipline and prowess of those he hated and mistrusted lay his sole remaining hope. He therefore sent a conciliatory message, promising to the strangers entire control over the affairs of the siege. To this the offended foreigners sent no reply. Other communications, more pressing, followed, and received a similar treatment. Consumed with a rage which, through policy, was concealed, the sovereign now repaired in person to their camp. There, in his entreaties, he was as abject as before he had been imperious. Appeased at last, the strangers agreed upon the following day to head the assault.

The succeeding sun rose upon everything in readiness for the decisive attack. From the principal gate, behind which the citizens had maintained the fiercest resistance, the Cambodian troops were drawn away, and at its front the strangers, in full armor, formed their column. They were all large men, and in the prime and vigor of life; and on each pale, bearded face was a look of sternest resolution. Helmets of stout leather were on their heads, surmounted by tufts of hair, and fastened by straps under the chin. Plates of burnished brass shone upon their breasts, so thick as to defy the force of dart or arrow, and the thrust of sword or spear. Lower, and supporting a pendent skirt of metal, was a

brazen girdle, the two together protecting loins and hips and thighs. Even the legs were incased in jointed brass, and, to cover all, each warrior bore a great, broad shield, in several thicknesses of bullocks' hides, well riveted and hung with bells. The figure of a lion, rampant and of fiercest aspect, adorned its face.

In their hands were massive spears, and across their shoulders belts were slung, supporting short and heavy swords. Upon the backs of some were bows and well-filled quivers, while others similarly bore long and sharp-pointed javelins. Closely, and in many ranks, they stood, and, just before the assault, the commanders exhorted the men to deeds of valor.

Suddenly a trumpet gave forth its point of war, and, with mighty rush, the dense array surged through the broken gateway. At the same signal, through other breaches, the Cambodian forces of Norodom poured again into the city.

From their side the besieged sallied furiously against the heads and flanks of the storming columns. After a sharp and bloody conflict, the native troops of the king were driven back, and even the serried phalanx of the West recoiled. Nevertheless, although for a time the advance was checked, the latter firmly held its ground. Against these warriors the citizens were at disadvantage. Themselves with little protection, they found their weapons turned and blunted upon the brass that incased the foe.

Notwithstanding this, the soldiers of Anirah maintained the battle with courage, hoping, by the force of numbers, and the persistent fury of their assaults, to overwhelm these armored enemies. Though the rush was broken, the formation of the foreigners remained

intact, and, like waves from a rocky front, the onsets of the people were shattered and flung back. Seeing that the strangers were holding their own, the Cambodians of Norodom were again encouraged to renew their efforts, and for many hours there was desperate fighting. Gradually it centered about the great gate, behind which the pale men of the sea were striving with the defenders. Terrible was the slaughter, even the strangers losing heavily, despite their armor.

At last, the armature and superior discipline of the soldiers of the West began to tell, and they were able again to press their way. The citizens commenced to waver, and then abandoned entirely the open space that had been so long and stubbornly contested. For an emergency so desperate Konesset had provided, and much remained to be accomplished before Norodom was again master of the capital. The heavier buildings were, of course, upon the land; the frail tenements of the poor having been principally upon the water. The streets, therefore, through which the enemy must pass were lined with many structures of strength. Each one of these had been converted into a military stronghold. The low walls and weaker buildings had been fortified, and upon every high place, and behind each barrier, was laid an ample supply of rocks and deadly missiles. These points of defense were now all occupied, and thus, within a thousand citadels, the people, still resolute, awaited the farther advance of the foe.

Soon, at the head of the principal street, their discipline still admirably preserved, the grim-visaged men of the West appeared. They pushed on, resolute and silent, followed and surrounded by native soldiers, in howling mobs, mad for blood and plunder. The citi-

zens, in their places of security, remained inactive. Even the rabble of Norodom, that gathered in frenzied throngs, endeavoring to force each door and gateway, were not molested, so long as the barricades were not endangered.

The immediate purpose of the strangers was to capture and occupy the royal palaces. They therefore maintained their order, pressing forward for a time unmolested, and with rapid steps. When, however, they had penetrated some distance, from either side of the narrow street a fierce attack was opened. Every wall and building sent forth a shower of darts, and from points of advantage great stones and beams of wood were hurled upon them. Neither helmet of leather nor brazen plate could resist the crushing force of such ponderous projectiles, and in scores the foreigners, bruised and mangled, fell to earth.

At the first opening of this unexpected attack the natives, panic-stricken, had deserted their allies, flying at full speed to escape from the dreadful city. As they ran the people rushed out upon them. So great was their terror that even the women and children slaughtered them with impunity. In tens of thousands these men had entered the capital, but of those who escaped to places of safety there were few indeed. The soldiers of Almeta were of sterner stuff, and, despite their losses, they still went on. Now, however, a missile of more fearful nature was coming into play. By order of Konneset, the women and children had made numbers of hollow globes or jugs of pottery. These had been filled with earth-oil, and covered with thick, loose-woven coats of cocoa-nut fiber, saturated with the same inflammable liquid. With coverings ablaze, these were

cast into the midst of the struggling phalanx below. As they struck, the fragile ware was broken, and the ignited fluid was scattered in all directions. Into the eyes of the enemy it was discharged, and over their persons, burning through the joints and openings of the armor.

For the first time the serried column wavered. Recognizing the peril of a farther advance, the officers gave the signal for retreat, and, with disciplined precision, the line of march was reversed. The exulting citizens now redoubled their exertions. Thicker came the crashing rocks and heavy timbers, and in a perfect rain the flaming fire-balls descended. By hundreds, as they retired, the strangers succumbed beneath this downpour of destruction, yet, through all, the survivors maintained, as best they could, the embattled front. Such was the heroism displayed that even the defenders were forced to forget their hate, and admire, as they plied the work of extermination.

With men all bruised and bleeding and burned, a fragment reached at last the gate from which, not long before, the strong column had advanced confident of victory.

CHAPTER XXI.

SUMMONING OF THE DEMONS.

Now the cause of Norodom seemed lost beyond recovery. The corps of Western warriors was destroyed, and his own soldiers demoralized and reduced by slaughter and desertion. Although the sounds of the

late conflict had scarcely died away, already Konesset was preparing for a sortie that was to sweep away the last remnant of the besieging army.

During all these stirring events the spell of Almeta lay upon the king powerful as ever. Even at this critical juncture, when he was thus enveloped by difficulties and perils that had been occasioned by her presence and machinations, her influence was unshaken. In his despair his only thought was to seek the woman and fly with her to some place of safety.

The Queen of the Western Seas had built a tower of immense height, and on its top had taken her place, a witness to all the fierce carnage as it progressed below. With keenest pleasure, as it flowed, she watched the crimson tide, and its exhalations ascended as fragrance to her nostrils. The disasters resulting from the jealousy of Norodom toward her people one word from her would have prevented; that word, however, she would not speak.

When, immediately after his last defeat, the king sought Almeta, he found her upon the tower's top, her cheeks aglow, and her eyes sparkling with demonian fire. She was yet exulting over the slaughter, with its tens of thousands of slain and wounded. As his eyes fell upon that face, Norodom stood as one paralyzed, without power to move or withdraw his gaze. From scenes of dread he had come, intending to speak, but what he now saw was more terrible than all, and it robbed him of utterance.

Beside the frenzied woman Orthys stood, in form and feature no less devilish than his mistress. His countenance, however, was not, like hers, lit up with unholy rapture. On the contrary, his brow was dark

and lowering. The burning orbs of black were restless, and the whole expression was one of anxiety and disquiet. In tones subdued but sharp, like the hissings of some venomous serpent, he urged his companion to the immediate invocation of their master, Maqui, Prince of Demons. That voice, low and sibilant, seemed potent with the woman. It recalled her at once, even from the fierce ecstasy that possessed her. Yielding instantly to his wishes, she drew from the folds of her robe a long and slender serpent of emerald hue. This she held lightly in hand, as a wand of enchantment. It swayed and twisted as she waved it, herself turning round and round, with regular and graceful motion, and chanting aloud her incantations, strange and weird. Thus, for some minutes, with arms aloft and vibrating in unison with the movement of her body, she spun around, all in time and keeping with the measure of the wild and necromantic melody.

Suddenly she stopped, and stood panting and exhausted, looking earnestly toward the east, where, in the great distance, stood the Isle of Demons. Then, uttering piercing cries, with all her remaining force she cast the glittering reptile into the space below, falling herself prostrate and insensible. As the serpent fell, it spread and dissolved into sulphurous vapor, which gradually dissipated in air. As this occurred, all nature seemed troubled and convulsed. The wind died down, and the atmosphere grew heavy and oppressive. Strange and muttering sounds were heard, like rumblings from the deepest caverns of earth. In the Orient all grew black, and, like a drapery of death, the shadow of this darkness rested upon the city.

An overmastering fear descended upon the people of

the capital. They felt themselves in the presence of some mighty and uncomprehended evil, and were weighed down by a presentiment of approaching destruction. The preparations for the sortie had been completed, and, when these dreadful phenomena appeared, the soldiers of Anirah were formed and ready to rush upon the foe. Now, however, leaders and subordinates forgot their hostile purpose in the anxious contemplation of the ominous spectacle appearing in the eastern sky. Heretofore women and children had vied in heroism with husbands and fathers, but now, overwhelmed with fright, they fled to the temples and pagodas, shrieking and wailing, and appealing to the gods and angels for protection.

Now, in the distance, approaching with the rapidity of the whirlwind and an uproar like the flapping of monster wings in myriads, appeared a great black cloud. Its somber surface was marked by countless points of lurid light; and as it drew near its fearful composition was apparent in a multitude of demons, bearing each in hand a scourge of flame. With sudden force they struck the trembling earth, and, bounding like huge balls of rubber, cleared the battlements of the city and precipitated themselves upon its doomed inhabitants.

These spirits of evil bore the semblance of humanity, but in shapes the most hideous and frightful which it was possible for human form to assume. They were black as the depths of bottomless pits. Like rough crags, their heavy brows hung low and rugged over eyes deep set in cavernous sockets, and glowing with the fires of malice and fury. Immense heads, covered with hair erect and stiff, like the bristles of a hog, were riven

below by enormous mouths, and set upon necks seeming by comparison thin and spindling. The curling, meager lips were drawn away in perpetual snarlings, exposing fangs more keen and cruel than those of tigers. Great noses hung, sharp and long and curving downward, like the beaks of vultures. From the sides of each enormous pate flapping ears projected, which swayed and jostled with every movement. Lengthened and attenuated arms and legs extended from short, misshapen bodies covered with hairy spines, and were terminated by hands and feet that were bony and like the claws of carrion-birds.

These were the Demons of the Air ; and they cast themselves at once upon the soldiers of Anirah, who by this time were scattered and flying in all directions. Pursuing the fugitives, and making way into the temples and pagodas, where the women and children had sought refuge, they struck all mercilessly with their whips of fire. At every stroke a victim fell, scorched and blackened by the infernal flame. Spreading in all directions, the fiends ran in furious course, blasting every creature that they met, until the people were annihilated, and the capital of Cambodia became a city of the dead.

CHAPTER XXII.

FLIGHT OF ANIRAH AND KONESSET.

THROUGHOUT the perils and excitement of the insurrection thus brought to a disastrous close, Konesset had displayed a caution and foresight and a wealth of

resource that were equaled only by his courage and resolution. After the burning of the enemy's ships, in anticipation of possible defeat, he had built a number of barges and canoes, intended to furnish the people abundant facilities for escape; but in the moment of supreme peril the populace thought most of appealing to the angels and gods. The short time that had been allowed them was employed in flocking to the shelter of the temples and holy places, in which, however, they found no protection. Few, therefore, of the unfortunate citizens had profited by the foresight of their commander, and the boats lay idle in the river.

With the others, a large and capacious canoe had been built for the use of Anirah and her child. Manned by faithful Atongans, it stood at the royal landing-place in constant readiness. When, at the approach of the demons, his soldiers were giving way, at full speed Konesset had hastened toward the palace. There all was in readiness for instant flight. Seizing the casket containing the jewels of his sister, he took the child in his arms, and bade the mother follow. This she did without hesitation or delay, and into one of the secret corridors Konesset led the way. It was scarcely closed behind them before the building was flooded with ravening fiends, slaughtering all they encountered.

The passage they were pursuing led under ground to the river-bank. In the mean time, Orthys or Mahagua, bent upon the destruction of Alompra's children, hastened into the city, immediately behind the demon army. Fearing the flight of his victims, he hurried along the stream, outstripping, in his zeal, the celerity of his infernal allies. As he drew near the royal edifice, the boat with its crew of Atongans attracted his atten-

tion, and left him at no loss to define its purpose. Springing forward, he raised a shout that summoned the devils to its destruction, hoping thus to defeat the plans of Konesset and prevent an escape.

But for the intervention of superior and supernatural power, the intentions of Mahagua would have been accomplished. As the demons ran tumultuously for the boat, a white and luminous mist appeared, enveloping it and checking the onset. Around the cloud of light the infernal spirits howled and raved; and, gnashing their teeth, with fierce cries and rageful gestures, they rushed to right and left. Despite their fury, however, they carefully abstained from contact with the sacred vapor. At this moment a secret door that lay concealed in the bank sprung open, and from the hidden passage Konesset, with Anirah and her child, came forth. As they did so, with fiery scourges uplifted, the fiends rushed toward them. Again, however, their murderous purpose was defeated, and about the intended victims another protecting mist descended. In their disappointment, the demons raised a din more fearful than before, while, with fierce glances and more frantic gesticulation, about the favored ones they circled wildly.

“It is Pra-Enn, the hated King of Angels!” they cried, in tones of furious malevolence. “He robs us of our prey! Cursed be his name for ever!”

When Mahagua beheld these things and heard this exclamation, he was filled with despair. All that he had done and all that he had encountered seemed coming now to naught, and the price, in hope of which he had incurred the dreadful pains of the future, was proving illusory. As one dazed he stood for a moment, while Konesset and his charges stepped into the boat.

Already the oars were rustling for the dip, when Mahagua awoke from his bewilderment, and, despite the awful presence enveloping the canoe, he rushed forward, as though to cast himself upon the hated ones and drag them to land. Scarcely had he started before Konesset, having deposited in safety Anirah and the child, himself stepped to the front, and, for a moment poising his ponderous spear, hurled it with all his force against his enemy. It struck him full upon the shoulder; and such was the fury of the stroke that the weapon forced its way through flesh and bone, and fell upon the earth beyond.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE PURSUIT.

MANY of the boats that had been built to facilitate the escape of the people were moored about the spot where Mahagua lay insensible. A number of Norodom's Cambodians, with a few of the surviving strangers, were also scattered along the bank, all engaged in the work of pillage.

Although severely wounded, Mahagua did not long remain unconscious. His first reviving thoughts turned upon his enemies, and he looked anxiously about to discover them. He saw the canoe that bore them some distance up the river, and speeding away. Then the fury of his hate was triumphant over physical pain and weakness. It would not permit the fugitives thus to escape without one more effort to reach them.

Dragging himself into the largest of the boats, he called loudly to the soldiers that were near him.

"Behold," he cried, "the woman Anirah carries off the son of the Golden Foot! Konesset, the leader of rebellion, escapes! Honor and riches to all that aid in seizing them! Haste! Haste!"

As these words were uttered, recognizing Orthys, and seeing the prospect of more brilliant reward, the men abandoned their plundering and hurried toward him. The barge that bore Mahagua soon had a powerful crew, and pushed off in pursuit. Others followed, abundantly manned, and together they all sped swiftly up the channel.

Among those that started, some were lighter than others, and shot ahead. Stimulated by repeated and brilliant promises, those that propelled the foremost canoes now strained their brawny sinews and were gaining slowly upon the chase. Thus out of the river and into the lake they passed, pursuers and pursued, all exerting themselves to the utmost.

Konesset, entering upon the broad waters of Thalèsap, had struck boldly for the opposite shore, a hundred miles away. After hours of strenuous effort, the enemy, in slighter boats, had gained so much that they were now almost upon him, and the race was drawing to a close. Of this Konesset was so well convinced that he ordered the men to lay down their paddles and prepare for defense. Within a short distance were a dozen or more of the hostile canoes; and others, scattering behind, would soon be up, to join in the fray. To the faithful Atongans the odds seemed overwhelming, but they were, nevertheless, resolved to deliver desperate battle.

Mahagua, reclining painfully at the stern of one of the foremost barges, fastened his evil eyes upon Anirah and Konesset. His bosom was torn by contending hope and fear. He seemed, indeed, to have the objects of his hatred completely in his power, yet was he dreading supernatural intervention a second time in their behalf.

The apprehensions, and not the desires, of Mahagua were to be realized. Above, upon the bright concave of the sky, a tiny spot appeared. Rapidly it grew for a few seconds, and then instantly spread itself over the entire heavens, as though by a sudden but noiseless explosion. Over all it now cast a preternatural obscurity. The waves, that before a fair wind had been running free, now died completely down, so that not even by a ripple the glassy bosom of the lake was stirred. Upon the face of nature fell a calm, unnatural and oppressive, and a mysterious influence was felt, foreshadowing the approach of the terrible.

The men that were in the boats, in fearing contemplation of these phenomena, withheld their hands from battle. Upon all but Mahagua were overwhelming fear and dread. Malice alone possessed his thoughts. Supposing all this to portend the intervention of Pra-Enn, he feared alone the destruction of his hateful hopes. In vain efforts at anticipating the fall of the impending catastrophe, he urged his men to strike without delay, and exterminate the foe. No heed was given to these commands, nor to the alternations that followed of furious raving and earnest entreaty. Now, in tones almost despairing, Mahagua called loudly to his master, Maqui, Prince of Demons, invoking his power that the enemy might not again be snatched

from vengeance. Vain, however, were these mad appeals : from the Demon Prince came no answering word or responsive sign.

In another moment, at some distance, the lake seemed stirred to its profoundest depths. As though boiling in a mighty caldron, the water seethed and turned white. In great masses, and without apparent cause, they were thrown high into air, and spun into long lines of spray, that dashed to the very heavens themselves.

Upon the bosom of Thalè-Sap a whirlwind was taking birth. In concentric and enlarging orbits it began to move, approaching with every sweep nearer and nearer. Its movement gained a velocity that was terrific, and its roarings deafened the trembling spectators. With resistless might it fell upon the canoes of the pursuers, and swept all but one from the surface of the lake. It crushed them into countless fragments, and rent into shreds the corpses of their occupants, carrying all away in a revolving mass of flying water.

Then, as though its purpose were accomplished, it abandoned its circlings and sped away in erratic line. Of all that had undertaken the capture of Konesset and Anirah, but a single barge was spared. It was the one that held Mahagua. Beholding the destruction of his own boats, and the sparing of the one which bore his enemies, he was transported with rage. In the blindness of his passion, he ignored the fact that the Aton-gans had now the advantage, and urged his followers to an attack. They, however, terrified by what had just transpired, thought only of escaping to the land, and accorded no attention to his commands or imprecations.

Had Mahagua been in possession of his powers as

these men turned away and paddled for shore, he would have cast himself upon them in the intensity of his wrath. His own impotence aroused him the more, and, unable to wreak his vengeance upon the disobedient crew, he gave expression to his strengthless fury in horrid blasphemies against the angels and gods, and fierce maledictions upon the demons and their treacherous prince.

CHAPTER XXIV.

IN THE LICHI MOUNTAINS.

THERE was nothing further to interrupt Konesset and Anirah until the opposite shore of the lake was attained. The course had been laid for the river Battambong, up which they ascended to its confluence with the Lamseng. The latter stream was mounted in its turn far as its waters would permit the canoe to float, when the boat was concealed, and the journey by land commenced.

The fugitives were endeavoring to reach the Lichi Mountains, which Konesset supposed would furnish a place of refuge the nearest to the capital. The country that lay before them was wild and almost uninhabited, and they had no one with them that was familiar with it. A few paths were seen—obscure and rough—that beasts, instead of men, had probably trodden down; and they were obstructed by twisted vines, and so encroached upon by stubborn brush as to be in all places difficult and in some almost impassable. The coppice on either hand was made up largely of thorny bushes

and spiny, stunted trees, that extended their branches across, tearing the clothes and flesh of those who sought to force the passage.

After a journey of this painful nature, consuming many days, they struck at last the first rise of the Lichi Mountains. Here the ways they had been following with such labor were lost or disappeared. The slopes were steep and rugged, and encumbered with loose stones of every size, that rolled beneath the feet and converted the ascent into a dangerous scramble. In places the difficulties were diversified by jungles of poh and other trees, and underwood of rank growth springing from the dark, rich soil which occupied interstices between the rocks. These trees and bushes, however, although their roots gave firmer foothold than the shifting stones, yielded the route only to strenuous exertion. Fearing to leave traces that would guide the enemy, even this exhaustive toil was preferred to clearing a pathway with knives.

In the heart of this rugged range smiling valleys were supposed to exist, and Konesset and his party had persevered, in the hope of falling upon one of these. They had been mounting higher and higher, until it was evident that a considerable altitude was attained. The thick-growing vegetation that had occasioned so much labor began to thin, and finally disappeared. Now the hardy fir alone covered the mountains. Overhead were the storm-scarred fathers of the grove, and underneath, its nurselings in dense thickets, green and beautiful. The decaying leaves of a thousand years had filled the crevices and depressions with strong, black soil, that was hidden by rich carpets of tall ferns, whose verdant plumes waved gracefully with the wind.

Higher still were bleak and sterile inclines, leading up to bald and rocky points that almost hid the zenith. Here no animal found shelter, and no bird flitted through the stripped branches of the scattered and stunted trees. The provisions of the fugitives were nearly exhausted, and the prospect gloomy indeed. Worn by anxiety and spent by fatigue, the gentle Anirah was in despair. The Atongans, thus far faithful and uncomplaining, began at last to murmur. Even the resolution of Konesset was shaken, and his hope of shelter within these inhospitable regions was almost gone.

The course was now changed to one descending and at the same time inclining toward the east. The deviation, however, brought no immediate benefit, and their condition seemed desperate as ever. They came at last to an uninviting valley which lay across their path, like a deep gash cut in the mountain-side. Down into its depths they proceeded, and the reverse slope was before them, abrupt and forbidding. Its ascent was about to begin, when suddenly the rocks beneath their feet were seized with violent tremor. The ridge confronting them shook to its very core, swaying and vibrating; while a deep rumbling possessed the air, reverberating against the encompassing crags and steeps.

The startled travelers halted, and stood as trembling witnesses. The rough acclivity rising before them was torn asunder, and in heavy masses rolled away. Before and to all sides the sterile rocks gave place to green and spreading meadows, broken by shady groves and watered by murmuring streams. Where but a moment ago all was barren, now reposed a smiling valley, according promise of peace and rest and abounding plenty. The

fugitives wandered through the vale, following the course of its bright streamlets and resting in the shade of its trees. They drank from its sparkling tides, and with its luscious fruits refreshed themselves. Forgetful of fatigue, the young prince dashed through the pellucid waters, startling the tiny fish, and shouting with glee as they scattered wildly.

CHAPTER XXV.

TRACING THE FUGITIVES.

THE wound that Konesset had inflicted upon Mahagua was most serious, and its consequences had been aggravated by the subsequent exertions of the injured man. When his boat had reached the landing-place after the vain attempt to overtake his enemies, he was unable to leave it without assistance.

When Almeta learned of his wounding, she was unable to command her feelings. In her grief, she cast all restraint aside, and gave vent to sorrow in loud wailings and impassioned lamentations. At the first tidings of his return, she hastened to the river, overwhelming the stricken man with tender caresses. She placed him upon a soft litter, and with utmost care conducted him to the palace. Gazing as they went upon his pallid features, she gave way to frequent outbursts of despair, betraying, seemingly without hesitation or regret, the intensity of her passion. When the royal edifice was reached, the most comfortable apartment was assigned to his use, and Almeta herself took position at his bed-

side, hoping to restore him by tender and solicitous nursing.

All of this Norodom beheld with jealous indignation. He upbraided Almata, receiving naught in response but indifference and scorn. He felt the bitterness of his slavery, but had not the power to break its chain. He could not tear himself from the woman, and yet it was suffering worse than death to witness another receiving the love and warm fondlings for which he himself was yearning. Nor was the woman herself less wretched. Her expressions of endearment were tolerated by the wounded man with an irresponsive indifference that was dreadful to her, or repulsed with impatient irritation. His wicked heart had room only for his one absorbing passion. Hate, hard and undying, occupied it fully, and to the exclusion of softer sentiments. Mahagua himself completed the triad of misery. His sufferings of soul were more agonizing than those of Norodom or Almata; for the fierce fires of ungratified revenge consumed him.

Although unable himself to act, Mahagua's vengeance did not sleep. He had sternly charged Almata to use every effort to discover the hiding-place of Anirah and Konesset. Obedient as a slave to his slightest wish, she complied, dispatching thousands of runners in every direction, and offering munificent rewards. The days, however, lengthened into weeks and the weeks into months without affording the desired intelligence. Racked by physical pain and by torment of soul, the wounded man was evidently sinking, and had passed beyond hope of recovery. It was only the iron will which held the spirit in the wasted frame; for, until he had made one more effort against his enemies, he was resolved to defy even death itself.

At last came information establishing the Lichi Mountains as the place of refuge that was sought. Large bodies of troops were dispatched to surround the entire chain with a heavy cordon. Notwithstanding his precarious condition, Mahagua determined to follow, in order to stimulate and direct the search. Almeta strenuously objected ; but her tears and remonstrances were not even received with patience. Unable to dissuade him, she was without power to resist his will, but determined to accompany him and continue her ministrations. In a litter, softly cushioned and curtained to exclude the sun, Mahagua was borne to his destination. A hundred practiced palanquin-bearers were charged with the duty of conveying him across the rough country that lay beyond the head of navigation. So numerous, in fact, were the guards and attendants that the retinue had the appearance of an army.

In making these dispositions, Norodom was not even consulted, and so intense was his jealousy that he thought often of murdering his helpless rival. From this, however, the dread of Almeta's furious displeasure restrained him. His complaints grew louder ; but they elicited only the violent abuse of the woman. Such was the strength of his mad passion that he had lost even the power of resentment, and sunk into a state of miserable and abject submission. When all was in readiness and the expedition started for the mountains, Norodom had not been asked to accompany it. Astonished and infuriated, he nevertheless shrank from the prospect of separation from her by whom he was enslaved ; and, repressing his rage, he hastily made his own arrangements and followed uninvited.

CHAPTER XXVI.

DEATH OF MAHAGUA.

AFTER long and tedious travel, the mountains were finally reached. The fatigue of the journey had told disastrously upon Mahagua. He now fell frequently into a state of insensibility resembling death. From such spells, however, he would rally, clinging stubbornly to life, and maintaining, when conscious, his faculties in all their brightness. He was, during all this time, borne down by the conviction that this his expiring effort, like its predecessors, would be thwarted; but his indomitable and vindictive nature would not, while the spark was in his body, permit him to yield to fate or accept defeat. Large detachments of troops had been ordered to re-enforce those already sent to the mountains; and, on arrival, Mahagua found at least a hundred thousand men awaiting his commands.

These were at once set to the task of overrunning the entire range. Rewards of magnitude were offered in favor of those who should first discover the fugitives. Like hounds at fault and seeking to recover the scent, the multitude thronged through the trees and jungles and over the rocks. Every cavern was traced to its farthest interior, and each chasm explored to its lowest depth. No peak or precipice, accessible to man, but was traversed with closest scrutiny.

During the search it occurred often that, in plain sight of those that made it, a lovely valley would appear; and beneath the shade of its trees or upon the margin of its streams, in apparent joy and contentment, the objects of their quest would be disclosed.

As, however, the explorers pressed eagerly forward, where just previously had seemed this paradise of verdure, some deep and perilous gorge alone was found.

At last, every spot within the compass of the mountains had been examined ; all, however, to no purpose. The men, spent by toil, were despairing of success, and sought to abandon the task ; but Mahagua, still resolute, drove them back again and again. His condition, however, was growing daily more desperate, until even his strong will could no longer retain the struggling spirit. As he felt his end approaching, and his vengeance yet unsatisfied, a flood of bitterness and woe overwhelmed his soul. Gasping upon his couch, he lay, striving to regain his breath ; only to exhaust it with raving blasphemies. So horrible was the impiety of these utterances that, except Almeta, all who heard fled in trembling fear ; terror-stricken, lest the punishment of heaven should be visited upon those who tarried to listen as well as upon the wretch who heaped his sacrilegious imprecations upon all that was holy and divine.

Almeta, in whom this deep, unselfish affection constituted the one redeeming trait, was filled with grief and despair almost as deep as his. Nevertheless, she sought earnestly to soothe the last moments of the dying man. All that loving heart could suggest was attempted ; but he repulsed her again and again with fury and contempt. Not satisfied with this, he left her a legacy of more bitter recollection and of misery more profound. As his life was about to pass away, and Almeta was leaning tenderly over him, summoning his expiring energies, full in the face he struck her one fierce blow, and was dead.

Notwithstanding this act of supreme brutality, and all the loathing and contumely that had preceded it, finding that the man she had loved with such devoted passion was no more, the woman cast herself upon his bosom, wailing and weeping, and covered with kisses the chilled and cruel lips.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE RULE OF ALMETA.

WITH heavy heart, and bearing the remains of Mahagua, Almeta returned to the capital, and Norodom, still in bondage, followed. The woman had spent the time consumed in the journey weeping over the lifeless body, and lavishing upon it the most tender caresses. When the metropolis was reached, there were held, in honor of the dead Mahagua, obsequies the most solemn and imposing ever beheld on earth. With her own hands Almeta reverently gathered his ashes and incased them in an urn of gold. These she kept and guarded, during the remainder of her life, with jealous care.

Cruel by nature, the new queen became now, if possible, more ferocious. She was practically the supreme ruler of the Cambodian realm, and mistress over the destinies of its people. Upon the latter, as though seeking thus to avenge her own wrongs, she heaped woe and desolation. She determined to restore the population of the capital to the number it possessed before it had been swept by the fiery scourges of the

demons. To accomplish this purpose, troops were sent in every direction, seizing the unfortunate peasants and removing them, regardless of their wishes. Guards were placed about the repopulated city, and none of its inhabitants were permitted to depart. It was upon those that were thus imprisoned that she practiced her worst barbarities. In various parts, altars were erected, upon which the children of the citizens were daily offered in bloody sacrifice; and the agonized parents were compelled to witness the murderous rites and participate in the dreadful ceremonies. The priests of Buddha were sought, and all that were found were mercilessly slaughtered; so that it came to pass that not a single wearer of the yellow robe could be seen in all Cambodia. The land was flowing with blood, which alone seemed to cool the fevered heat of Almeta's frenzied anguish. In comparison with this terrible woman, Norodom during his worst days had been merciful.

In her insensate rage she attacked Divinity itself. The true religion the Wise One had established was banished from the kingdom, and its temples and pagodas were desecrated and defiled. Sacred images of Gautama and of the gods and angels were broken into fragments and buried in the mire. The places from which the blessed effigies had been thus deposed were given to idols and representations of the Evil Ones, and at these unholy shrines all were compelled to worship.

Assuming shapes of hideousness and deformity, and in numbers innumerable, the demons descended upon the land and abided in the homes of the people. They vexed them beyond endurance, inflicting bodily harm of every nature. In the vain hope of propitiating the

fiends, the populace were humble and submissive, paying to them abject court, and even adoration. Some, prompted by the same motive, sought to mollify their infernal masters by deeds of sin and shame, and the perpetration of unnamable crimes.

The evil influence of these myriads of devils brought on fatal and lingering fevers, which swept the country in recurring epidemics. Painful diseases appeared, covering their victims with sores which nothing could cure or eradicate. Of these, leprosy has remained through time, as a dreadful legacy handed down from that era of demonian rule.

Of those so grievously afflicted, thousands, driven by perpetual and unendurable pain, walked restlessly through the streets of the city, or wandered over the roads of the country. Men, sick unto death, in the intensity of misery, sought no couch, but, like beasts, lay down upon the highways to die. All were enveloped in universal wretchedness. So desperate was the lot of each, that men could think only of themselves, and the ties of nature were forgotten and the duties of blood and kinship abandoned.

During all this time, Norodom, although not sharing the physical sufferings of his people, was yet the most distressed of Cambodians. Almeta still scorned his passion, and heaped upon him perpetual maledictions and revilings. His heart was corroded with jealousy, and his spirit chafed under treatment so galling and humiliating, but he was without power to rebel. He was not insensible to the degradation of his condition, but struggled often, but without success, to burst the bonds which held him in such thralldom.

To sharpen his torment, recollections of the gentle

Anirah would force themselves upon him. The realization of the fact that she, with the pure happiness her coming had brought, was lost for ever, increased his bitterness; and so remorse lent weight to the heavy burden which oppressed him.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AVARICE OF ALMETA AND NORODOM.

OF the vices that had returned to rule Norodom, upon the withdrawal of Anirah's restraining influence, avarice was one. It seemed now to have become the dominant passion. Doubtless, in its gratification, he sought relief or respite from consuming jealousy and torturing memories. In this Almeta followed his example, and in rapacious instincts and practices alone was there union between this wretched pair. Together they used every exertion in the accumulation of spoil. The pagodas and temples were stripped of all the rich metals and jewels with which the ancestors of Norodom, and the piety of generations, had decorated or endowed them. The nobles and wealthier classes were shamelessly robbed, and even the poor did not escape.

By such means the treasure-rooms of the palace were filled to overflowing, and to the same use other chambers were necessarily applied. Long hours of each day would Norodom spend in these apartments, surrounded by his hoards, touching the gold and handling and counting gems of infinite price.

Notwithstanding the magnitude of these accumula-

tions, Almeta and Norodom were not satisfied. Having appropriated the substance of their own people, they were forced to look to other countries. Large armies were equipped, and, without provocation or warning, precipitated upon the adjoining kingdoms. Great battles were fought, involving loss of life that was immense, and resulting almost invariably in victory for the Cambodians. All of the Malayan Peninsula not already dependent was now subjugated, and its inhabitants decimated and reduced to ruin. The Straits of Malacca were crossed, and the most populous and fertile portions of Sumatra overrun and pillaged. The powerful kingdoms to the west and northwest were attacked in turn, and succumbed before the conquering arms of Cambodia. Even from the mighty Empire of China itself rich provinces were wrested, and the fierce races of Southern Hindostan were brought into cruel subjection.

Wherever the forces of Norodom passed there was left a broad trail of desolation. Temples were plundered of their precious ornamentations and destroyed. The wealth in the treasuries of the kings was appropriated, and the palaces and houses were stripped and left in ashes. The richest of all this booty was forwarded to the Cambodian capital, where so immense became the accumulation that one of the royal palaces was converted into a great treasure-house, and even that was filled to overflowing.

Upon the fierce natures of Norodom's soldiers no restraint was placed beyond such discipline as was essential to maintain their efficiency. Every passion was gratified at the expense of the unfortunate people through whose territories they swept. In addition to

those that fell in battle, thousands were butchered in cold blood. The troops, receiving no pay from their master, lived upon the invaded countries, and for compensation seized all that was not worthy to be forwarded to Norodom. Thus it happened that the crops were universally laid waste, and the useful animals destroyed. The towns were reduced to smoldering heaps, and in the rural places scarce a house was standing. The miserable creatures that escaped the wholesale slaughters skulked and hid in the jungles and in fastnesses of the mountains.

Where, before the advent of these furious invaders, flourishing cities had stood and smiling fields were spread with plenteous harvests, all was left black and wasted in one vast expanse of devastation. The carnage and destruction, while pandering to the greed of Almeta and Norodom, rose like sweet incense to the nostrils of Maqui, Prince of Demons. On the other hand, the shrieks of the dying, the tears and wailings of the living, and the smoke of universal conflagration, ascended to the sight and hearing of Pra-Enn, the Angel King, and filled his heart with sorrow.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE MYSTERIOUS STRANGER.

FAR into Hindostan had one of Norodom's armies pushed its conquests. It had swept the valley of the Brahmapootra, and descended upon the rich Gangetic delta. It lay before the strong walls of Chandernagore,

upon the Hoogly, which stream bears to the sea the most sacred waters of the Ganges. Aware of the horrors which subjugation would bring upon them, its inhabitants resisted with fierce courage and unflinching determination. The stubbornness of this defense infuriated the besiegers, who vowed to visit upon its citizens a vengeance even beyond that inflicted upon those of other conquered places.

The valuable lessons in military art which the Cambodians had acquired from association with the Warriors of the West had been of great service to them in the prosecution of these wars. Particularly effective had been the engines and expedients of siege with which they had been familiarized during the investment of their own capital. By these agencies they were enabled to breach the walls and force the massive gates of Chandernagore, the city of rich temples and beautiful palaces. No sooner was this accomplished than the soldiers of Norodom poured in their victorious columns, and, after a short but furious struggle, triumphed over all opposition. Then, their weapons dripping gore, they scattered over the doomed metropolis, slaughtering every creature that they met. The affrighted populace sought shelter in their temples, vainly putting trust in the intervention and power of their gods. Into these sanctuaries, mad with the spirit of carnage, the conquerors forced their way, and the beautiful mosaics of the floors and the snowy marble of the altar steps were crimsoned and made slippery with blood.

In one of these holy places within the fallen city a strange experience befell the victors, rushing in to plunder and slay the trembling fugitives that there had sought a refuge. As they dashed across the threshold

an aged and venerable man suddenly confronted them. In appearance he was noble and imposing. Over his neck and shoulders in snowy locks the hair fell, long, luxuriant, and graceful. His beard hung full, white and silken, far down his breast. The brow, high and broad, indicated a mighty intellect, while the eye, large and brilliant, shone with a luster that was not of earth. Impressed by the majestic bearing, and relying upon his protection, the terrified people were clustering close about him.

As the Cambodians entered, their weapons were already uplifted for the slaughter. Feeling, however, the power of those deep, mysterious eyes, they halted abruptly. The arms, upraised, were shorn of power, and fell innocuous. Abashed and with downcast heads, like criminals convicted, the invaders stood trembling. A solemn pause of many moments prevailed, broken at last by the soft and impressive tones of the stranger.

“Let the slaughter cease,” he said. “Go ye to your commander and bid him appear before me, without delay, here within this temple.”

This mandate filled the soldiers with fear and trepidation, yet they found themselves unable to disobey. They believed their chief, so soon as the message was delivered, would order their immediate execution for what must seem an insolence of their own. Great, however, was their astonishment at the result. Instead of encountering from the sanguinary man an outburst of rage, they saw him rise quickly, bidding them lead the way. At the moment of receiving the behest there had fallen upon him the influence of the Mysterious One, and he was impotent as those who bore it to resist. Arriving at the temple, and entering into the venerable

presence, the general was filled with deepest awe, and felt his will absorbed into that of the Being that stood in majesty before him.

“Send forth at once the order of recall,” the stranger said, “and stay the work of carnage. From this city of Chandernagore, by the rising of to-morrow’s sun, thy troops must be withdrawn. Thou and they must return to the capital of Cambodia, and with thee I go to visit thy royal master. Upon him will I bestow more of wealth than by thy conquering armies could be secured.”

The terror with which his men had been possessed, when dreading to deliver to their superior the mandate of the unknown, was as nothing compared to that which now filled the heart of the commander. Remembering the stern injunctions of his master, he believed a violation of them so bold as that which was now required was a virtual condemnation to death. Yet, as was the case with the soldiers, by some potency, mysterious beyond his comprehension, he felt impelled to obedience. He therefore proceeded at once to comply with the bidding he had received.

CHAPTER XXX.

ARRIVAL AT THE CAPITAL.

THE army that had stormed the city of Chandernagore had withdrawn from its limits, and retired beyond its shattered battlements. Its weary march was taken up to the capital of Cambodia. To the subordinate

officers and the soldiers here was a mystery inexplicable, and they were loath to abandon a career of slaughter and pillage that had proven so successful.

The venerable stranger was accompanying them, and they soon came to associate with him these movements, to them so incomprehensible. They murmured among themselves, at first quietly and then more openly. From this they proceeded to loud and violent denunciations of the commander, and imprecations upon the one who had persuaded him to retreat. A conspiracy was formed for the purpose of slaying them both, and placing the army under a new chief, who would return to a course of conquest in wealthy Hindostan. They were encouraged by the conviction that their sovereign would approve of what was done. At all events, it was certain that the spoils of richer countries that had not yet been devastated would condone the offense.

The preliminaries were duly arranged, and a day was fixed for the uprising. When it arrived, from all parts of the camp a sudden uproar came, and in tumultuous throngs the rebels rushed toward the quarters of their commandant. Hearing the shouts and the clashing of arms, the latter believed his fate at hand. He took position, nevertheless, at the side of the stranger, feeling that in his mysterious power lay the only hope of safety.

On came the mutineers, seeing nothing to stay them or to prevent the execution of their designs. As, however, they came before the countenance of the Mysterious One, and his glance was upon them, the onset was arrested, and fury was replaced by awe and dread. The menacing weapons were lowered at once, and the soldiers were subdued and powerless. Cowed and submis-

sive, they retired at a word, glad to escape. The sullen troops from this time gave no trouble, but performed in dogged silence the remainder of the march.

The Cambodian capital was reached at last. In advance of the army, the news of this abandonment of the campaign in Hindostan had come to Norodom. Astonished and enraged, the monarch resolved to visit upon his general the most severe and summary punishment. The offending officer was seized in the very presence of his troops, and loaded with chains. Then through the gate of criminals he was ignominiously dragged to the city, and hurried into the royal presence. This man, long accustomed without fear to confront the pains and perils of the field of battle, was now filled with terror at the prospect of the ire of one who could do no more than take his life. Such was the result of education. Before his sovereign the dismayed warrior came groveling, more abjectly even than the servile code of Cambodian etiquette required. The king, incensed, would have pronounced his immediate condemnation had it not been that his curiosity was aroused as well as his wrath. The most astounding rumors were in circulation, and Norodom was anxious to learn all.

“Accursed dog!” the monarch exclaimed in savage tones, “thou hast dared to cast contempt upon our mandates! What madness possessed thee that thou shouldst return unsummoned from the seat of war?”

So deep was the fear of the prostrate man that for some moments his voice was beyond command, and he was powerless to reply. The brows of Norodom grew darker and his rage more fierce.

“Speak, wretch!” he shouted savagely.

Spurred to greater exertions by this passioned ex-

clamation, at last the trembling general forced his speech.

“Most Excellent, Glorious, and Merciful Sovereign of Land and Water,” he said; “Lord of the Celestial Elephant Saddan and of all White Elephants; Master of Sakya, Indra’s Supernatural Weapon; Controller of the Present State of Existence; Great King of Righteousness; Object of Worship! thy majesty’s slave, Maong-Lu, commander of thy majesty’s third army under the excellent Golden Foot, makes obeisance, and tenders expression of submission and of deep regret for exciting thine anger, which is so terrible that the potentates of earth tremble when it is aroused. Humbly thy slave prays that the merciful ear of thy majesty may be lent to his supplication.

“The invincible army of the Golden Foot was gathering the spoils of Chandernagore, when an aged and venerable man appeared. His are all the secrets of magic, the arts of transmutation, and of brewing the wonderful elixirs of youth and life. To the treasury of the Sovereign of Sovereigns he promised more of wealth even than could be taken by victorious armies from the richest nations of Hindostan. To this, however, he would pledge himself only for the sparing of Chandernagore, and the withdrawal of thine army from Hindostan. We have brought him to the capital, that his powers may be exercised to the profit of the Golden Foot.”

The influence of the Mysterious One was still upon the general, and by the will of the former this answer had been dictated. On the avaricious monarch the declaration produced a marked effect. To his mind the prospect of an acquisition of wealth that should have his

wishes alone for a limit was most brilliant, and it filled him with excitement. Visions of gold in heaps innumerable flitted through his brain, and of precious gems beyond the power of human count or estimation. His fancy even pictured himself the possessor of the priceless secrets themselves, and so become a very creator of the metal he worshiped. Wrapped in reveries such as these, the king remained some moments as though entranced. Recovering himself, he thought only of converting to reality the bright dreams that had filled him with ecstasy, and he was so eager to summon the stranger that his anger against the commandant was forgotten.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE UNKNOWN BEFORE NORODOM.

IN obedience to his mandate, the Unknown was brought into the presence of Norodom. The soldiers, as they entered, fell prostrate before their sovereign, but he that was with them did not follow their example. Erect, majestic, and at ease, he stood before the monarch. All that witnessed this refusal of the stranger to abase himself were filled with astonishment and fear, expecting to behold a fierce outburst of the royal indignation. Stirred to blind and sudden wrath, the king, indeed, rose hastily from his seat, and was about to give expression to his rage; but the eye of the Mysterious One rested upon him, and the fury of his anger was gone. Avarice again was ascendant, and the longing to possess the secrets was uncontrollably upon him.

Resuming his seat and smothering his passion, thus spoke Norodom :

“ We are told,” he said, “ thou art the most potent of conjurers, and master of the seven great secrets of nature ; that thou canst at will change all things into gold and precious gems. It is our pleasure to learn from thee if this be true.”

“ As to my power,” was the reply, “ thou hast spoken truthfully ; and if it pleases thee to consider me a conjurer, so let it remain.”

“ The general of our army,” the king resumed, “ withdrawing unauthorized from a career of glorious conquest, in extenuation of his offense reports that thou art bound to us by solemn stipulations, and that, for sparing thy people, thou didst obligate thyself to impart to us the secret of transmutation. Art thou now prepared for compliance with the stipulations of the compact ?”

“ Thy general hath not so declared,” the answer was. “ What I have promised, he has truly recited, and, as I have agreed, whatever thou desirest shall be transformed into precious metal or gems of value. This, and no more, is at thy service.”

Norodom was conscious of his lie ; but that a sovereign of Cambodia should thus be charged with falsehood had never before been known in the history of the realm. The king was therefore astonished as well as incensed. His avarice, however, was excited to a pitch so high as even to control his wrath, and the punishment of this unpardonable offense, like that of its predecessor, was relegated to the future. The monarch deemed it prudent, before venturing upon extremes, to secure an ample compliance with the engagement, such as it actually existed.

“This shall be a matter for our future determination,” Norodom responded. “Meanwhile, it is our will that thou shouldst employ in our behalf the powers to which thou layest claim.”

“King of Cambodia,” replied the Mysterious One, “it shall be done.”

At the royal suggestion, the stranger first laid touch upon the dais serving as a throne, and on the instant it was of burnished gold. The pillars supporting the roof and the tapestries upon the walls, the umbrellas and other emblems of authority, each was converted in turn. Then from all quarters of the palace every article that was portable was brought and transmuted. The floor of the Hall of Audiences was encumbered and piled high with golden accumulations, until physical fatigue triumphed at last over the avarice of Norodom. Then he commanded the withdrawal of the stranger. The guard was cautioned to keep him strictly, and warned that their own condemnation would be the result of his escape.

Having witnessed striking evidences of the power of him they were charged to hold, the soldiers were filled with terror. Conscious of their inability to restrain him, they passed the night in fear, praying fervently that of his own volition he would remain.

CHAPTER XXXII.

STRIVING FOR THE SECRET.

THE night brought no rest to Norodom. Its hours were hours of wakefulness, broken only by short and

occasional snatches of disturbed and unrefreshing slumber. Waking, he could think only of his gold, and sleeping, he was oppressed by visions in which the aureate spell of the stranger seemed broken and his work undone.

Of all the passions that rule the heart of man, avarice is probably the most insatiate. Its slaves are never content, and nothing can satisfy its sordid cravings. Perpetual anxiety preys upon its victims, who are ever harassed by the fear of losing what they have. It verifies the axiom, that vice carries its own punishment, but it is a punishment that is not reformatory.

Of this rule Norodom might serve as a noticeable illustration. His palace was already filled with treasure, and yet his avidity was keen as ever. It was only sharpened by the liberality of the Unknown One. Now, however, its deeper aspirations were asserting themselves, and during the night the purpose grew stronger to possess the power itself of transmutation.

As the tedious hours lagged, the matter was before his mind in every aspect. The thought that the stranger might destroy the charm and rob him of what had just been acquired filled the king with increasing terror. Then he would imagine this conjurer passing on to other realms, and building up other sovereigns in wealth, to be rivals of his own. The only preventive that suggested itself was to slay the stranger after his own purposes had been fully subserved.

When, upon the following day, the Mysterious One was again brought into his presence, Norodom was fully determined at all hazards to secure the secret. Accustomed to the servile worship of his people, he did not doubt that condescension and flattery would readily accomplish his object.

“Mighty Enchanter!” he said, “it is with astonishment and delight that we have witnessed the manifestation of thy mysterious power. The generosity that has contributed so largely to the wealth of our treasury shall ever be borne in grateful memory. It is our royal desire that thou shouldst remain at our capital, an honored member of our court. At thy command shall be all that can minister to comfort or pleasure, or aid in the studies or practices of magic. A single favor we solicit in return. That our power may be extended and enduring, we ask that thou shouldst communicate to us the art of transmutation.”

“O king!” was the reply, “I am a wanderer, whose mission will not permit him to tarry in Cambodia.”

There was nothing encouraging in this response, but Norodom determined upon another effort.

“Our wish,” he resumed, “might, nevertheless, be gratified. It would cost thee nothing, but to us would be of infinite advantage. Is there within our authority naught which can serve thee as its price? Thou didst concern thyself in the withdrawal of our armies from the banks of the Ganges, and hast paid munificently for the favor. Though our troops have been retired, there is nothing in the compact to prevent their return. If thou, however, wilt yield this secret, our royal pledge is given that the forces of Cambodia will never again be placed upon the soil of Hindostan.”

“The knowledge I possess is priceless,” the stranger made answer, “and to my favor thou hast no claim. Never again shalt thou ravish the plains of Hindostan, or despoil the rich provinces of China.”

The language and manner of the Mysterious One were so incensing to the monarch that he could scarcely

restrain his passion. Still, however, determined upon success, he resolved now to test the efficacy of menace. Assuming his sternest aspect, in harshest tones he thus addressed the Unknown One :

“Thine insolence,” he said, “merits immediate death. We have endeavored, out of an abundance of grace, to secure the secret by promises of reward. This thou hast surely taken as a confession of fear and weakness. Be assured, however, that we are neither weak nor fearful, and that if gentler means avail not, harsher will be applied.”

To these words the Mysterious One made no response, but stood silent and impassive. Norodom paused some moments for the answer, and receiving none, was enraged. Losing the control he had so far maintained with difficulty, he gave furious expression to his wrath.

“Vile slave !” he exclaimed, “speak, or we send thee to the torture !”

As these words were uttered, as if by common impulse all eyes were turned upon the majestic figure standing before the king. As this was done, the flashings of the deep eyes filled the gazers with awe and dread, and all but Norodom were trembling with apprehension. The stranger remained yet silent and possessed. Receiving still no reply, the monarch was filled with fiercer rage.

“Wretch !” he exclaimed again, “now shalt thou pay at last the penalty of thine insolences. Thou art condemned to torment and to death.”

Now the great palace itself seemed to share the terror that rested upon all except Norodom and the Unknown. It shook in every part. The guards and

attendants were possessed with deeper apprehension, and a consciousness of impending catastrophe. Almeta herself, as she sat beside the king, was dumb with fear. Beyond the walls of the royal edifice startling phenomena filled the people with amazement and alarm. The skies, though clear, gave forth their thunders. The rush of mighty winds was heard, yet, save by earth's tremblings, no leaf was moved. Without apparent cause, the waters of the river and lake were in violent commotion.

Within the Hall of Audiences the terrified spectators were astonished at the reply of the stranger to the furious words of the king.

"Thou shalt receive the secret," he said. "Let the guards and attendants retire."

Those that were present did not wait for the monarch's confirmation of the order; all were vanished in a moment. Almeta herself attempted to depart, but was powerless to rise. As the soldiers and servants passed out, duty was forgotten, and they remained not in the antechambers. As they ran, the other domestics of the household and members of the guard, the courtiers and nobles of the palace, all joined in the rout. When these emerged into the streets the panic spread, and throughout the city men were shouting, and the women and children were shrieking and wailing. Gathering their frightened offspring, fathers and mothers abandoned home and effects and joined in the mighty exodus. Even the animals of the capital were dismayed, and followed in the flight.

The promise of the Mysterious One was fulfilled, and Norodom possessed the secret. He made repeated trials of his newly acquired powers, until convinced of

their reality. Then, with all their force, his suspicions and fears returned. Arrangements had been made before this interview for the sudden slaying of the conjurer at a signal from the king. The most expert swordsman of the metropolis had been present to decapitate him at a stroke, and, as an additional precaution, the guards were to plunge their spears into his heart.

The monarch now called to his attendants, but the summons brought no answer. Louder and more peremptorily he cried, and still without result. Infuriated, he started up and shouted, calling the officers by name with furious denunciations and threats. Through the deserted corridors of the palace the angry voice awakened only echoes, which came back as though in mockery.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

DOOM OF NORODOM AND ALMETA.

As the monarch vainly called, the Unknown One stood some moments calm and quiescent. Then he turned, and slowly made his way toward the entrance. Norodom, considering this as an attempt at escape, shouted more furiously than ever. Receiving still no response, and breathing vengeance upon his guards and attendants, he arose from the throne and hastened to an open doorway. Casting his wrathful glances along the halls, of all his court and household not one was to be seen. Then, in the blind impetuosity of passion, he drew his sword and sprang toward the stranger. He

raised the blade to strike, and, as he did so, all nature was convulsed. He against whom was uplifted this sacrilegious hand was Pra-Enn himself, the King of Angels. All of Norodom's strength was in his arm, and the blow was descending, when there was heard the noise of a mighty explosion, whose sound sped to the farthest confines of creation. The earth quivered and shook, as though rent from its firm foundations. The sun stopped and wavered in its course. The palace and capital were torn from the bosom of the plain, and the battlements and buildings of the city, broken into countless fragments, were hurled into space.

When, after a long delay, the people found courage to return, they sought the spot where formerly had stood the metropolis of Cambodia. They found the places where its palaces, temples, and pagodas had been, and around which had circled its massive ramparts, now covered by the waters of Thalè-Sap. Here the tide was fathomless and accursed. Its depths were black and noxious, and the dead surface was never ruffled by the breeze. Within its foul and unsearchable deeps no fishes swam, and over its repulsive bosom the birds of air refused to fly.

From that day to this, within the boundaries of Cambodia never has been seen stone or splinter of the mighty city. In other lands, however, great rocks or smaller fragments, which once had formed part of its thick walls, or of its massive pagodas and other structures, descend from time to time as aërolites or in meteoric showers.

Norodom and Almeta, a damned and guilty pair, borne upon the blast that swept up like the breath of destruction, were cast upon the surface of the moon.

Such was the force with which they were dashed upon it that the satellite itself was shaken, and every nerve and muscle in their wretched frames was bruised and shattered, so that they were filled with a pain and agony that was intense and enduring. Norodom's love was gone, and a fierce loathing filled them both, one for the other, so that association was intolerable. There, darkening the otherwise bright disk of night's silvery luminary, these creatures stand for ever as a warning to all nations of the retribution that always follows crime. Thus it is that the Cambodian annals afford the faithful story of the moon's inhabitants, which the traditions of all other nations have sought so vainly to recite.

The same resistless force that dashed Norodom and Almeta against the moon scattered through the heavens the vast treasures of the sinful couple. The canopy of the night is thickly incrustated with gems and precious stones that were once theirs. Into the clouds are mixed the molten masses of their gold and silver, illuminating with gorgeous splendor the morning and evening skies. Over the high-heaped clouds that hang about the sunset is often spread more of wealth than earth since then has ever gathered in a single accumulation.

Overweening avarice still torments the wretched Norodom. To his view these treasures, once his own, are perpetually exposed, and his bosom is rent by fierce longings for their re-possession. On her part, the wicked Almeta, casting her eyes to where in deepest torment lies Mahagua, is ever filled with wild and despairing sorrow and a remorse that is grievous to be borne.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

RESTORATION OF ANIRAH.

DURING the transpiring of these momentous events, within the smiling valley in the heart of the Lichi Mountains, in peace and safety, were Anirah and her child, with Konesset and the faithful Atongans. The sound of the great explosion, which rent from earth the capital of Cambodia, had been heard within its enchanted circle, and all that were in the valley felt that some occurrence of utmost importance was betokened. It was not long before an angel appeared in the guise of a bird of exquisite beauty. Resting upon an overhanging rock, it sang in tones of rapturous sweetness, and, as the melodious notes were heard, to interested ears they brought the story of Norodom's doom and of the destruction of his city.

The vale of refuge was abandoned, and out of the Lichi Mountains Konesset led the way. By angel hands the road was smoothed and cleared before them, so that the rough slopes presented no difficulties, and the dense jungles were traversed with ease. The headwaters of the Lamseng were reached, and the canoe drawn from its place of hiding. Down this river, with favoring wind and flowing current, they passed, and into the Battambang, until the waters of Thalè-Sap were again in sight.

Here the mandarins and nobles were met, and numbers of the populace, on their way to prosecute another search for their beloved queen and her son. These multitudes greeted Anirah with unbounded delight, and joined her party, forming an extended and magnificent

retinue. As they progressed, other throngs were encountered, hastening to welcome their cherished mistress. Escaping from the cruel dominion of Norodom and Almeta, to Anirah the populace attributed their salvation. Always dear and sacred in their sight, now, as a second time their savior, she was more than ever held in love and veneration.

The canoes almost covered the broad expanse of Thalè-Sap. They were decorated with flowers and gay streamers, and their occupants were attired each in his best and brightest costume. By force of reaction, the spirits of the people, so long weighed down by wretchedness and woe, now reached the very climax of delight, and they gave vent to the delirium of their joy in great shouts and in animated gesticulations.

For the use of the royal party a magnificent barge-of-state had been provided, and into this Anirah and her child, with Konesset, were transferred. Behind, according to rank, the splendid boats of the grandees were ranged, followed in turn by those of the lesser dignitaries and of the populace, all forming one long and imposing line. Thus, in grand procession, the way was held until Thalè-Sap was traversed and the neighborhood of the destroyed capital attained.

The population that had fled in terror on the eve of the great disaster had established themselves upon the river-bank some distance below. Here Konesset considered it best to build the new metropolis, but Anirah, grieving for Norodom, despite his wickedness and infidelity, shrank from founding her new home so near the scene of his destruction. Another location was therefore selected in accordance with her wish. It lay to the north of the great lake, about fifteen miles be-

yond its border, and between the rivers Paleng and Siamrap. About the chosen site a wall was built, thirty feet in height, and far more massive than that which had stood around the former capital and been unable to resist the engines of the warriors from the West. In a great quadrangle of many miles these battlements were erected, and a wide, deep moat surrounded all. Five huge gates of massy strength gave entrance within the walls. Of these, two opened to the east, in honor of the golden orb of day, which, rising there, symbolized the grandeur and power of Pra-Enn, Angel King, Master of Light, and Protector of Cambodia's Queen. Within the circle of these ramparts was built a city far exceeding the lost one in beauty and magnificence. Temples and pagodas were erected, and palaces whose equals in size and elegance the world had never seen before. The sacred buildings were dedicated to the Enlightened One, and his image, with those of Pra-Enn and other divinities, expensively wrought, were set with honor upon altars rich with gold and precious stones. Extensive monasteries were built to shelter the holy priests that had returned in numbers since the downfall of Almeta.

The new metropolis was given the name Angkor Thom, or the Great City. So firm were its foundations, and so solid its majestic superstructures, that even to this day, after long centuries of Cambodia's decadence, in the midst of wildest jungle, are to be seen the remains—grand and imposing—of the wonderful city founded by the Queen Anirah.

Through the length and breadth of the kingdom the people cast from the holy places the effigies of the Evil One, with which, by Almeta's command, they had been

desecrated. With zealous cleansings and solemn religious rites these shrines were purified, and the sacred images restored. Thus demonolatry, which the wicked woman had forced upon an unwilling people, was expelled, and the pure worship resumed its sway.

Even these acts of virtue did not satisfy the pious Anirah. She desired to afford a striking and enduring evidence of the gratitude of herself and of her people toward the Supernal Powers that had protected her and redeemed the nation. It should be in keeping with the magnitude of the mercy shown, and should survive as long as the human race itself. Nothing could reach the height of this pious expectation save a vast temple, which in itself should be a city covering great area, and affording shelter to thousands of holy priests. Within its precincts for ever adoration should be paid to Gautama and all the gods. Naught should be spared in its construction, so that it should be sublime in the grandeur of its proportion, and yet exact and beautiful in its minutest detail. Filled with a purpose so high, the queen summoned to her capital the most skillful builders of the realm, and by rich rewards sought to stimulate them to conceptions worthy of her desires. They labored, however, in vain, and nothing was produced commensurate to her hopes. Then embassies were dispatched to the Imperial Court of China, and to the great kingdoms and principalities of Hindostan left unravished by the troops of Norodom. These formal deputations besought the monarchs to whom they were commissioned to send their most cunning architects to Angkor Thom to strive for the rewards offered for a fitting plan for the mighty cathedral. Thus, men of wondrous skill and cunning were gathered in hundreds

at the Cambodian metropolis, who exhausted their art and invention in this task of exceeding difficulty. Imposing designs were presented, many surpassing anything that had ever yet been reared upon earth, but Anirah was not satisfied.

She finally despaired of securing a plan as noble as that to which she aspired, and was about to select from among those that were submitted and proceed with the erection of the temple. Now, however, assistance came from an unexpected quarter. Straying, one morning, to the most secluded portion of her private garden, she rested for a moment beneath a palm-tree. There, as she sat lamenting the disappointment, the balmy south wind fanned her brow, and soon a gentle slumber crept upon her. Sleeping, she beheld the vision of an aged and venerable man of dignified and comely appearance. In his hand was a great scroll, and in mild and winning accents he addressed her.

“Queen of Cambodia,” he said, “thou art in grief because of the great temple of which thy piety suggests the building. Thou hast exhausted every means of Nature to secure a conception worthy of thy virtuous purpose. In thy tribulation my potent master, Pra-Enn, King of Angels, hath resolved to aid thee. He sends thee here a design which will call into being a Temple City worthy of thy hopes. Cast thine eyes upon yon hills and behold the semblance of the mighty plan.”

Anirah obeyed, and as she gazed there settled down upon the elevation a gray, thick mist. The vapor gradually took shape and color, and spread itself into the seeming of a stupendous fabric, rising in successive stages to a central tower, massive and high, and dominating the entire country. The terraces, three in num-

ber, supported each a separate pile with rich façades and great towers and tall spires, either of which structures alone was befitting Anirah's highest expectations. Approached by monster causeways and climbed by broad and imposing stair-flights, encircled by magnificent peristyles displaying the grandest porticoes, this vision was one whose sublimity long held the gaze of the queen entranced in contemplation.

CHAPTER XXXV.

ANGEL BUILDERS.

IN her sleep, so earnestly Anirah gazed upon the airy temple that the venerable figure of him who had called it forth escaped from her attention. In its contemplation she was still enwrapped, when the trampling of feet and the voices of many men broke in upon her slumber, and the vision was gone. Opening her eyes, she found that while she dreamt the hours of the day had sped away, and night had settled upon earth.

In the fragrant shrubbery, and through the groves of her garden, a hundred lights were flitting. Men, excited and troubled—Konesset of the number—were loudly calling and anxiously searching for the missing queen. Anirah's exclamation of surprise attracted the notice of her brother, and he in an instant was at her side. The flare of his torch fell upon the ground, revealing at her feet a large and heavy roll. The queen seized it eagerly, and unwound it partially in the uncertain rays of the flambeau. There, upon parchment, she beheld the

fabric of her slumbers. Her delight was so intense that she burst forth into loud and joyous exclamations.

Then, as he led her into the palace, she recited to Konesset all that had occurred. Together they examined the scroll more closely, and beheld there drawn with fidelity the outlines of the Temple City, with every detail given and explained with careful accuracy. It appointed as well the location upon which the structure was to be reared. This was a tall hill about five miles to the southward from Angkor Thom. Alone the elevation stood in the midst of the plain, and its sides sloped upward gently and uniformly to a broad and even top. In all respects it was admirably adapted to support the stupendous pyramidal pile depicted upon the parchment.

No time was lost in the commencement of the work. Thousands of laborers covered the surface of the hill, leveling its base and summit and cutting the slopes into terraces, preparatory to receiving the rocky masses to serve as foundations. Other thousands were in the quarries and in the forests, preparing the great blocks and timbers.

The work was conducted upon principles of honor, strikingly in contrast with the methods employed some years before in the building of Almeta's palace. The sound of the lash was unheard, and the toil of no man was forced. All that was done was justly compensated where compensation was demanded. The spirit of Anirah descended to the lowest workmen, who performed their part with zeal and fidelity. They deemed that in aiding the erection of this sublime fabric they were honoring religion and contributing to Cambodia's glory and to that of their beloved queen. Many would receive

no remuneration for what they did. The effect of impulses such as these was noticeable. They urged the men to labor more rapid and efficient even than that which had been wrung by fear from the sullen multitude of former years.

Contributions flowed in, without solicitation, from the rich, while the poor gave generously from their scanty stores. Foreign princes and potentates of virtuous inclination, hearing of the vast and pious design, sent large sums to be devoted to the work. Notwithstanding all this, and although Anirah exhausted in its behalf all of the public treasures beyond what was absolutely required for the expenses of government, for want of sufficient funds the gigantic undertaking came to a stop. Although it had been progressing for many months, the design was so immense that what had been performed to the time of suspension seemed as nothing.

Anirah's heart was so firmly fixed upon the great project that this result pained her deeply. As she retired to her chamber, after the issuance of her mandate for this cessation, she passed long hours in sobbing and in tears. At last she appealed again to him who out of the abundance of his grace and power had already so frequently befriended her.

"O Merciful Pra-Enn, King of Angels!" she said, "thou who hast given the wonderful conception we have striven vainly to realize, unless thou in clemency aidest, surely this fabric shall never rise. Oh, that a memorial so sublime to the Enlightened One and to all the divinities that cherish mankind should fail! Come then again to our assistance in such manner as thy wisdom may deem the best."

This fervent exhortation seemed at once to calm

Anirah's grief, and she sank into peaceful slumber. The angel-king heeded her tearful invocation. During the hours of the night he sent a multitude of giants and an army of dwarfs, who took up the uncompleted task where the workmen had left it.

The giants gathered immense quantities of stiff clay from the bottom of Thalè-Sap, which they kneaded until it was plastic but still firm. Then they shaped it into massive blocks for foundations, walls, and stairways ; into shafts for columns and pilasters, and great slabs for causeway, roofs, and pavements. So soon as this was accomplished, the dwarfs busied themselves smoothing and polishing, and covering every separate part with exquisite carving. With some fluid of mystic power they moistened each finished block and piece, and what was clay before was now of solid rock. With mighty efforts the giants heaved these stones in place. So gently was this done, and so exact was the dressing, that every part fitted with precision. Mortar and cement were needless, and scarcely could the human eye detect the lines of junction.

Some of these masses were so heavy that the grip of the gigantic hands that raised them sunk the strong fingers into the rock itself. Thus deep marks were left, giving evidence to this day of the labors of the giants, as the delicate carvings bear witness to the skill and deftness of the dwarfs. Thus was reared, by angelic power, Nakhon Wat, the City of Temples.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

FINIS.

ENCOURAGED by royal example, throughout the length and breadth of Cambodia the people entered with zeal upon the practice of virtue and religion. The wise precepts of Gautama were universally respected and observed. The piety of the queen in erecting Nakhon Wat, eliciting, as it did, such striking evidences of angelic favor, found imitators in every city of the kingdom and in the rural provinces.

Propitiated by a godliness so universal and conspicuous, the Divine Powers poured upon this favored realm their choicest blessings. The soil produced abundantly, enriching all that dwelt upon it. Trade, conducted upon principles of strictest honor, brought advantage to all concerned in its multifarious transactions. Cambodia became the granary of surrounding nations, receiving in exchange for its surplus products the commodities of other lands, until there was naught that luxury or necessity demanded that its children did not enjoy.

Thus sprang up, once more, a commerce that was profitable, affording employment to thousands of junks, whose sails darkened every sea. Wherever the ships of Cambodia sped, the waters were smooth before them, and partial winds were following to waft them on.

The swamps and jungles were cleared, affording no longer a shelter to murderous beasts and venomous serpents. Instead, were cultivated fields yielding bountifully for the support of man and of the animals that befriend him. The people no longer feared to disclose

their wealth, and the whole face of the country was beautified and improved. All were contented and prosperous according to station, and such was the prevalence and controlling influence of religion, that the simpler joys of the humble were not corrupted and destroyed by the corroding canker of envy.

Among all, so strong was the spirit of harmony that wrangling and litigation were at an end. The spiders stretched their lines across the halls of justice, and their webs enwrapped the seats of the judges. Peace and unity were in every household. Husbands and wives were loving and faithful, and matrimonial discord was no more. Children were obedient and respectful, and parents attentive and indulgent. The tie of fraternal love bound more closely than ever, and all dwelt together in happiest accord.

The fame of Cambodia's felicity spread far and near. The oppressed and suffering subjects of less favored lands were filled with a longing to share its blessings. The compassionate heart of Anirah was large enough to embrace them all. In great numbers these strangers entered her dominions, but such was the wisdom and firmness of her government, and the continued favor of Supernal Power, that the influx in no manner stained the virtue of her people, or impaired the prosperity of the country.

Anirah and Konesset joined in the task of educating and training the boy who was some day to rule the destinies of this joyful realm. They sought at once to cultivate the mind and heart, so that, when the period of his power was at hand, he would be just and humane, and experienced in affairs of government; and at the same time a devout worshiper of Buddha, and a strict

observer of the sacred precepts. The young prince was docile and intelligent, profiting by these valuable lessons, and delighting the hearts of his fond mother and devoted uncle by the rich promises his disposition and conduct gave. At the same time the grateful Cambodians, while they exulted in the present felicity, were rejoiced at the happy prospect of its long endurance.

THE END.

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